A study of the role of women in the burial rituals of the Ife of southwestern Nigeria.

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A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE BURIAL RITUALS OF THE IFE OF SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT.

This thesis examines the funeral rituals of the Ife and the role of women in those rites. The Yoruba see death not as an end of man, but as a transition from this earthly world to a new realm of existence. Death is classified according to the different ways or manner in which it came to the affected person.

There are many types of burials in Ile-Ife. The digging of the grave, the washing, dressing and wrapping-up of the body are done by the *ìsọ̀gán* of each lineage. The celebration of the funeral of the old is a time of feasting and thanksgiving because the deceased is thought to have completed his lifespan on earth. The death of the young is thought to be unnatural because the deceased has been cut off in the prime of life. The body is buried by the *ìsọ̀gán* in the compound of the parents. The members of the Oramfe Cult are responsible for the burial of those killed by lightning. Efforts are made to remove the causes of such bad deaths.

Death rites celebrated by women include *Ẹkún ọ̀wúrọ̀*, performed to separate the deceased woman from the other wives of the lineage; *ìfárí opó*, "the shaving of the widow's head", a spiritual divorce between the widow and

the deceased; and *ìba pípè*, a special funeral feast celebrated by women.

Ẹ̀sọ́ gbígbé is celebrated for deceased men and women of the Ẹ̀sọ́ Ìkòyí lineages. It helps separate the deceased from other members of the lineage. At the celebration of the death rites of *ẹ́kún òwúrọ̀* and *èsọ́ gbígbé*, people are possessed by the dead. In Ile-Ifẹ, mourning is the exclusive business of women. Many changes have been observed in the celebration of funeral rites by the Ifẹ people.

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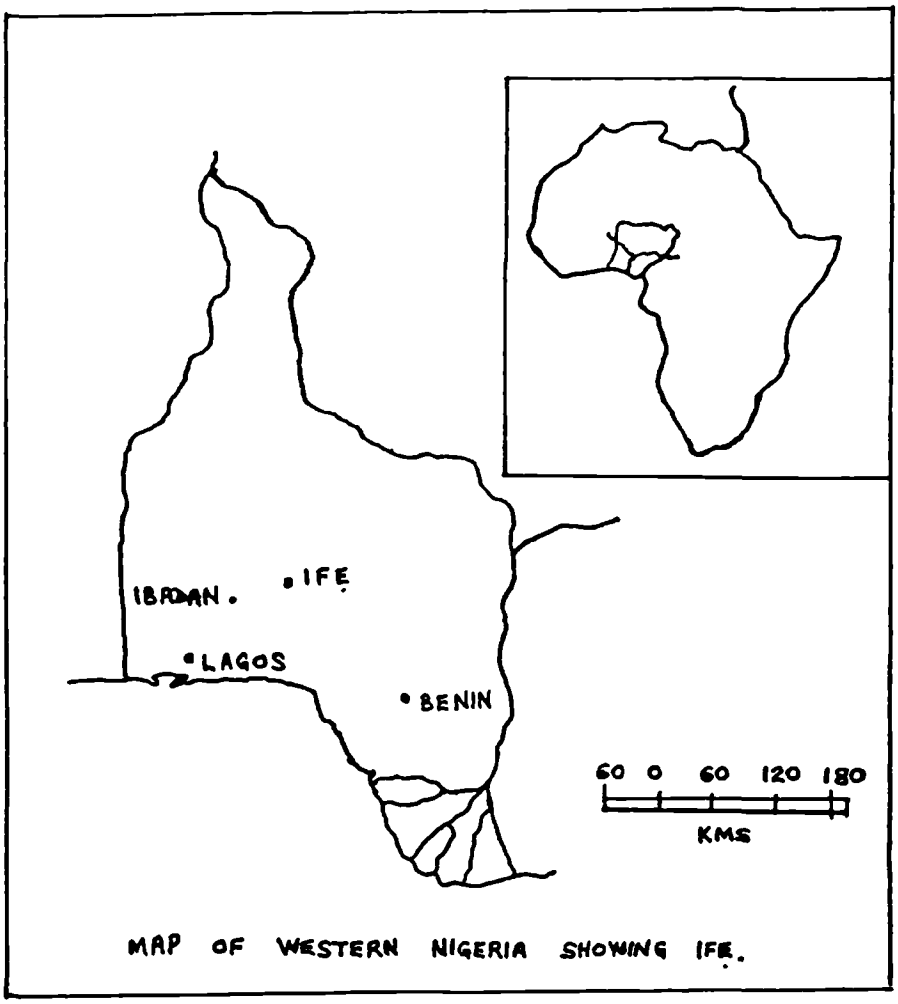
Map of Western Nigeria Showing Ile-Ife.



MAP OF WESTERN NIGERIA SHOWING IFE.

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Chapter 1.

Introduction: Burial Rituals of the Ife Yoruba.

In this chapter, the following topics will be discussed: the location of Yorubaland, the social organisation of the Ifẹ, the beliefs about the City of Ile-Ifẹ, the hierarchy of the gods in Ile-Ifẹ, the Ifẹ festivals and, the relations between accounts of death and the worldview. The methods of study, the review of previous studies on the subject and the aims of the study will also be undertaken.

The Yoruba: The Yoruba people live in Southwestern Nigeria in West Africa. Their language is known as the Yoruba and it is spoken widely not only in Southwestern Nigeria but also in some parts of Benin Republic, Togo and Sierra Leone.[1] The Yoruba in Southwestern Nigeria are broadly divided into distinct groups such as the Ifẹ, Ijẹsha, Ekiti, Ibadan, Ọyọ, Ijẹbu, Ẹgba and the Igbomina. Each group inhabits a town/city or a number of cities, and can only be distinguished by their different spoken dialects of the Yoruba language. The population of Yorubaland is about 9 million. (Smith 1969:9).

The Yorubas all trace their origin to the ancient City of Ile-Ifẹ and believe that they all descended from

a common ancestor named Oduduwa. (Forde 1951:4). The sons of Oduduwa were believed to have founded the ancient Kingdoms in Yorubaland such as those of Ọyọ, Ilesa and Benin. It was from Ile-Ifẹ, according to oral tradition, that all the Yoruba people migrated to all other Yoruba towns and cities.[2]

The City of Ile-Ife: Ile-Ifẹ is located on longitude 4.6°N and 7.5°N.[3] It is surrounded by hills. The City of Ile-Ife is about fifty miles (80.467 kms) to Ibadan and Osogbo.[4] While the City is known as Ile-Ife, the people are known as the Ife but it is not unusual for people to refer to the City itself as Ife. The Ife people sometimes refer to the City as *Ilurun*, which means "the gateway to heaven". (Eluyemi 1986:16). But to all Yorubas, it is the "holy city" of the race.[5] It is believed that Ile-Ifẹ was the city of origin of most of the Yoruba gods and that it was the site of creation, where men and women, black and white, were created.[6] Robert Smith notes the importance of Ile-Ifẹ:

"..the primacy of Ifẹ in the life of the Yoruba - their religion, their political system, their culture, - is unlikely ever to be contested. Until now, Ifẹ preserves its major mysteries inviolate: its kingship,

gods and shrines, its incomparable sculptures.." (1969:31).

According to the 1963 census, the population of Ile-Ifẹ was about 130,000.[7] There has been no official figures since then. Ile-Ifẹ lies in the tropical zone, in the heart of the tropical rain forest. The seasons are divided into two: Rainy and Dry seasons. The Rainy season starts from April to October while the Dry season starts in November and ends in March.[8]

The occupation of most of the adult males is farming.[9] But we also have people who work in the educational sector, craft industries and those who trade. The majority of women fall into the last category.

Farmers produce two types of crops, food crops and cash crops. Food crops produced include yams, cocoyams, bananas, maize, peppers, different types of vegetables and melon. Cash crops include cocoa and kola nuts. Palm produce falls in-between food and cash crops because of its domestic use (palm oil which is used for cooking); and its export purposes (palm kernels which are produced for the export market). (Forde 1951:7).

The Social Organisation of the City of Ile-Ife.

The Compound: Each compound/lineage in the City of Ile-Ife is headed by an adult male known as the *Baálé* and he is usually the oldest man. (Fashogbon 1985:31). He is responsible for maintaining peace in the lineage and all disputes that cannot be settled by the head of each family are brought to him for arbitration. (Bascom 1969b:44). He organizes the performance of communal sacrifices. The *Baálé* is assisted by the *Lóógun;* he is always a middle-aged man who can run around and be the eyes and ears of the *Baale.* It is the *Lóógun* who organizes the digging of the grave at the death of a member of the lineage and supervises the burial. (Bascom 1969b:45; Fashọgbọn 1985:32). All able-bodied men from the age of seventeen to fifty constitute the *ìsọ̀gán.* They are the burial guild of each lineage and they are headed and directed by the *Lóógun.* All male and female members of each lineage are known as *ọmọ ilé,* "the children of the house". (Bascom 1969b:43).

The wives of male members of each lineage constitute a family association known as "the women of the house", *obìnrin ilé.* They are headed by the most senior among them (according to the date of their marriage into the

lineage) who is known as the *Ìyàálé*, which literally means "mother of the house". She assists the *Baálé* in the daily running of the affairs of the Compound by seeing that there is peace among the wives of male members. She settles all disputes and refer difficult ones to the *Baálé*. At the death of a member of the lineage or of one of the wives, she organizes the women to undertake the necessary rituals and makes sure that they help to cook the funeral meals. She is assisted by a younger woman known as the *Lórímọdé*, which means "the head of the younger women". The *Lórímọdé* is always a younger woman in her fifties who can run errands for the *Ìyàálé*.

<u>The Ife Chieftaincies:</u> There are many types of chieftaincies in Ile-Ifẹ. Some of the Chiefs are the Town/Outer Chiefs also known as the Ifẹ Chiefs (Bascom 1969b:33); the Palace Chiefs known as the Mọdéwá (Bascom 1969b:34); the Ìsòrò Chiefs who are the "Religious Chiefs" (Fabunmi 1985:81); the Women Chiefs (Fashọgbọn 1985:22) and the Honorary Chiefs. Only three types of chieftaincies which are relevant to the Study will be discussed. They are as follows:

<u>The Town/Outer Chiefs:</u> These control the main wards of Ifẹ and all disputes that cannot be settled by the Baálé

of each Compound are referred to the Chief of the respective ward for arbitration. The Chiefs and their respective wards are as follows:[10]

Chiefs	Wards
Ọruntọ	Irẹmọ
Ejio	Mọrẹ
Ọbalọran	Ilode
Jagunọsin	No area
Wasin	Ilarẹ
Akọgun	Ikọgun/Okerewe
Ejesi	Ilode
Ọbalaaye	Iraye

The Palace Chiefs/the Modewa: They are also known as the Inner Chiefs. They are helpers of the King, who assist him and run errands for him, in the palace and outside it. (Bascom 1969b:34; Fabunmi 1985:81). The most important among them are : Lọwa Ijaruwa, Shanire, Jaran, Erebẹsẹ, Lọwate, Ladin, Aguro and Arodẹ.[11]

The *Ìsòrò* Chiefs/Religious Chiefs:[12] They are responsible for the worship of various divinities in Ile-Ifẹ, hence the name *Isoro*, which loosely translated means "the one who performs rituals". Some of them are:

Ọbaluru: The head of the Iloromu lineage in Ile-Ifẹ. The Iloromu live at Mọrẹ, Ile-Ife and the areas around it. Obaluru is the Chief Priest of Oramfe divinity, the Ife god of thunder and lightning.

Ọbadio: The Chief Priest of Oduduwa divinity and head of Idio lineage. He worships Oduduwa with members of the lineage at Idio.

Ọbawara: Chief Priest of Ẹlẹfọn and Ogun divinity. He organizes the worship of Oro, Ogun and Ẹlẹfọn divinities. He is also the head of the Iwara lineage at Odo-Iwara, Ile-Ifẹ.

Osogun: The Priest of Ogun divinity and an assistant of Obawara. He is directly responsible for the worship of Ogun, the god of iron.

Lokore: The Chief Priest of Ọbameri divinity; he is responsible for the worship of the divinity. He lives among members of the Lokore lineage at Lokorẹ, Ile-Ifẹ.

Apata: The Chief Priest of Ẹ̀sìndálẹ̀ divinity. He is responsible for the worship of Esindale. He lives at Ita-Apata among members of the Apata lineage.

Ọbalaayan: An assistant of Obaluru, from Ìlóróṁù, Mọrẹ, Ile-Ifẹ. He is the Priest of Esu Obasin, the Ifẹ divinity of storms.

Walode: The Chief Priest of Olokun divinity, the goddess of the sea. He lives in Walode Compound and he is head of the lineage.

Obalara: The Chief Priest of Obalufon divinity.

The *Ọ̀ọ̀ni* of Ife: The King of Ile-Ifẹ is known as the *Ọọni*. He is believed to be a sacred being because he sits on the throne of Oduduwa at Ile-Ifẹ; (Smith 1969:18), Oduduwa being the first King. He is thus regarded as the father of the Yoruba race, in both the political and the spiritual sense. (Idowu 1962:15; Bascom 1969b:6; Smith 1969:16 & 108).

The Ife Cosmology and Myths of Creation.

Creation of the World: Olodumare, the Supreme God charged Oduduwa with the task of creating the world. Oduduwa descended (*rọ̀*) at Mọrẹ, Ile-Ifẹ by the means of a chain.[13] Tradition states that he was assisted by a priest known as Ojùmu.[14] At that time, the whole of the world was covered with water. Ojùmu threw a handful of soil on the surface of the water and placed a five-toed fowl on the sand. The fowl spread the sand, making the sand to cover a large surface. All the places it covered became dried land and it is this land that is today

inhabited by humans. A chameleon (*ọ̀gà*) was put on the soil to test it if it was hard enough for humans to tread. Having created the land, Oduduwa asked the other divinities to descend by means of a chain. One of those who descended was Obatala.[15]

The Creation of Human Beings: Ọbàtálá, also known as Orisanla was charged with the task of creating human beings. His job was to mould man with clay. Olodumare put the breath of life in the moulded figures.[16] Ọbatala was fond of palm wine and often became intoxicated, with the result that all the humans he created after drinking were deformed. They became hunchbacks, albinos and the lame. They were consequently known as *ẹni òrìṣà*, literally "people of Ọbatala divinity". They were dedicated to Ọbatala and were his worshippers.[17] Ọbatala is still accepted today as the one who creates babies and put them in the uterus at conception. (Farrow 1926:43). Ifẹ tradition states that it was Obatala who created men and women of every race, including white people, who were believed to have been bleached by gales in the temperate regions of the world.[18]

Hierarchy of the gods: About 401 divinities are believed to be worshipped in Ile-Ifẹ. (Fabunmi 1969b:403). It is indeed said that out of 365 days of the year, only one

day is free when sacrifices are not worshipped to any divinity. I am yet to come across anyone, even the ritual priests who can name that day! This illustrates the large number of divinities worshipped.[19] The most important gods in Ile-Ifẹ, listed in a hierarchical order are:

Oduduwa: He was reputed to have been the father of the Yoruba race, who created the world on the instructions of Olodumare. He was deified on the account of his status as the founder of the Yoruba race and as the first King of Ile-Ifẹ. He was said not to have died. Traditions said that when he became old, he ascended into *Ọ̀run*, heaven where he now sits as the head of all the divinities. His temple is at Idio, Ile-Ifẹ.

Obatala: The creator of humans. He is worshipped by a large number of people in Ile-Ifẹ; these include women who are childless and are keen on having children. (Stevens 1966:187). His temple is situated at Igbo-Itapa, Ile-Ifẹ.

Oramfe:[20] The Ifẹ divinity of thunder and lightning who is revered and feared by the Ife because of his activities in the sky. Ọramfẹ is believed to be responsible for killing people by lightning. His shrine is at Igbo Alapaara in Ile-Ifẹ.

Ogun: The god of iron, worshipped by all who use iron, travellers, traders, farmers, hunters and drivers. His main shrine is at Okemogun, Ẹnuwa Square, Ile-Ifẹ, although small shrines can be found all over the City. He is believed to have cleared the bush on the footpath used by all the divinities when they left Mọrẹ, in Ile-Ifẹ after descending from heaven. Because of this, he is worshipped by all those who want solution to their problems.

Ifa/Ọrunmila: The Ifẹ god of divination who is also known as Agbọnniregun. He was one of the divinities who descended from heaven with Oduduwa. He was charged by Olodumare with the task of divining for man and interceding with other divinities and spiritual beings on man's behalf. Ifa is said to be very wise and clever. His shrine is at Oke-Itasẹ in Ile-Ifẹ, very close to the palace of the King Ooni. Tradition says that he lived very close to the palace of the King Ooni so that he could be easily reached for advice. The Chief Priest of Ifa is Chief Araba.

Ẹsìndálè: An earth divinity of the Ife. He is distinct from the divinity *Ilẹ̀*, Earth which is also worshipped in Ile-Ifẹ. Ẹsindalẹ is regarded as a close friend of Ọlúayé (Sọnpọnna). After Oduduwa created the world, Esindale was

said by tradition to have been responsible for spreading the soil on the ground to "the end of the seas and the banks of the lagoons".[21] This is shown by the etymology of his name: "Ẹsindalẹ", "*Ẹ̀sìn tó dá ilẹ̀*", which literally translated means "the religion which created the earth". The worship of Ẹsindalẹ is therefore connected with the worship of the earth (*ilẹ̀*) which was his handiwork.

Obameri: He is worshipped by members of the Lókòrẹ́ lineage and is regarded as a fearful divinity who has a special liking for eating the heads of human beings. Heads are his special delicacies. To obtain these heads, he forces people to hang themselves, particularly thieves, murderers and some other evil people. This is the reason why he is known with a special appellation: "he who cuts off a person's head to help relieve the itching on the person's neck".[22]

Oluorogbo: His shrine is at Ìlásẹ̀, Ile-Ifẹ. He is regarded as an important divinity because of his heavenly duties. It is believed that from his (Oluorogbo's) shrine in Ile-Ifẹ, he travels to heaven three times a day to submit reports of happenings on earth to the messenger of Olodumare (God).[23] It is in this respect that Oluorogbo has been described as "the mediator between

heaven and earth" whose task is to save the people of Ife from disaster (Parratt 1969:344). Hence, an excerpt from his praise poem says:

"...Rather than let the life of the King,
And those of the people of Ife become bad,
It is Oluorogbo who,
Continuously improves the world".[24]

Obalùfòn: One of the sons of Oduduwa, who reigned after his father. (Parratt 1969:344). His shrine is at Ọbalufọn, Ile-Ifẹ. The Priest is Chief Ọbalára.

Olókun: The divinity of the seas and oceans. One of the wives of Oduduwa, (Parratt 1969:342), she blesses people with wealth. Her shrine is at Wálódè Compound in Ile-Ifẹ.

Major Ifè Festivals.

The Ifẹ festival calendar starts in May and ends in April.[25] Each festival is celebrated annually and the most important ones are:

Olójó: This means "the owner of the day". It is a festival celebrated in honour of Ogun, the divinity of iron. It is usually celebrated between September and October. The King Ọòni is directly involved as he has to pay two visits to Ogun's shrine at Okemogun at Ile-Ifẹ to

lead the worship of Ogun by offering certain sacrifices and saying prayers. It is on those two occasions that the King wears *Arè*, a special type of crown believed to have first been used by King Ọbalufọn. (Fashogbon 1985:29). Osogun, the priest of Ogun is the chief celebrant at the festival.

Edì Festival: In ancient Ifẹ, a distinct group of people known as the Ìgbò invaded the City on a regular basis, from the forest. They would maim, kill and take people away as slaves. The Ìgbò[26] were fearful to see as they were always dressed as if they were visitors from another planet. The Ifẹs could not fight back as they did not know how to fight these weird-looking people.

At that time, there lived a woman in Ile-Ifẹ known as Mọrèmi. She promised to find out the secret behind the physical appearance of the Igbo and the source of their power. She went to Esinminrin stream and vowed that if she returned alive and could successfully bring an end to the raids of the Igbo, she would sacrifice any living thing (a fowl, goat or even human) who first sets eyes on her in her house on her return. On the next raid, she did not run away but allowed the Igbo to capture her and take her away as a slave. Being a beautiful woman, the King of the Igbo took her as a spoil of war. Mọremi thus

used the opportunity to find out that the Igbo were not from another planet; they were only dressed in dried grass and reeds in order to frighten the Ifẹs. She defected back to Ile-Ifẹ and revealed this secret to the Ọọ̀ni, King of Ifẹ.

When the Igbo came to Ile-Ifẹ on the next raid, the Ifẹs lit "flaming brands" (Willett 1960:232) and set the invaders on fire. The Ifẹ̀s won the war and this brought the raids by the Igbos to an end. When Moremi got back to her house, the first living organism she saw was her only child, a boy named Ẹ̀là who came to hug her. Moremi was distressed and very upset when she remembered her vows. Moremi fulfilled her vows to Esinminrin stream by offering Ela to the stream. Ẹ̀là was immolated in the stream that day. Moremi thus became an Ife heroine.

Since then, the Edì festival has been celebrated annually in remembrance of her and to commemorate the defeat of the Igbo. (Beier 1956:28). Mock battles (with flaming brands) are reenacted at the festival. (Willett 1960:232).[27] Sacrifices are offered and a "human scapegoat" is made to carry away the "corpse" of Ẹ̀là and "the troubles" of the people of Ifẹ and "deposit them" (Ẹla and the troubles) in the forest. Chief Yékéré is the priest in charge of the festival.

The Ọlọ́jọ́ and the Èdì are the two most important festivals in Ile-Ifẹ and they are well attended every year by thousands of Ifẹ people.

Idio Festival: It is celebrated in honour of Oduduwa divinity, the founder of the race. The priest of Oduduwa, Chief Ọbadio is the chief celebrant.

Ìtàpá Festival: Celebrated in honour of Orisanla/Ọbatala, the creator-divinity. Chief Ọbalesu is the chief celebrant.

Ọdẹ Ọràmfẹ̀ Festival: It is celebrated annually to commemorate the life of Ọramfẹ divinity, the Ifẹ god of thunder and lightning. The Chief Celebrant is Chief Obaluru, the Chief Priest of Ọramfẹ.

Ọbameri Festival: It is celebrated in honour of Obameri divinity. The Priest of Ọbamerì, Chief Lokorẹ is the Chief Celebrant.

Orò Festival: Celebrated annually in honour of Ẹlẹ́fọ̀n Erekoseju who devised a means of driving away bad people and evil spirits from the City of Ile-Ifẹ.

Oluorogbo/Orisa Ìlásẹ̀ Festival: This festival is celebrated between January and February every year. Ọbalásẹ̀, the Priest of Oluorogbo is the Chief Celebrant.

Egungun Festival: Celebrated by members of the lineages in which *egungun* is traditionally brought out. The dates usually fall between June and July.

The Cosmology of the Ifẹ.

Following the model developed by Morton-Williams (1964:243-261), to the Ifẹ, there are three spheres of existence. The first sphere is this world, *Ilé Ayé* where humans live. It is populated by humans, spirits, animals, insects and vegetation. The second sphere *Inú Ilẹ̀*, earth is believed to be inhabited by spiritual beings known as "the people of the soil", *ará ilẹ̀*, worms and some animals. It is also a temporary abode for the dead after death, where it is subjected to questioning by the people of the earth. Although the dead finds its way to heaven, the earth nevertheless contains their bodies. Hence, the reference to the earth by the Yoruba as "Mother Earth", compared to a woman who supports her child in her womb. The earth also supports humans by seeing that crops grow and bear fruits and seeds; and by giving us water in various forms. The earth is worshipped in Ile-Ife by some people and members of the Ògbóni secret society.

The third sphere of existence is *Ọ̀run*, heaven. Heaven is believed to be sub-divided into two spheres:

"the heaven of the ladder", *ọ̀run àkàsọ̀*, and "the heaven of Àjàlọ́run or Olodumare/God", *ọ̀run Olodumare*.

(a) The Heaven of the Ladder: It is believed to be inhabited by the ancestors, the divinities and a spiritual being known as Àjàláyé, who occupies the position of "Assistant of God/Olodumare". It is held that judgements are delivered to the dead in this heaven by a group of divinities.

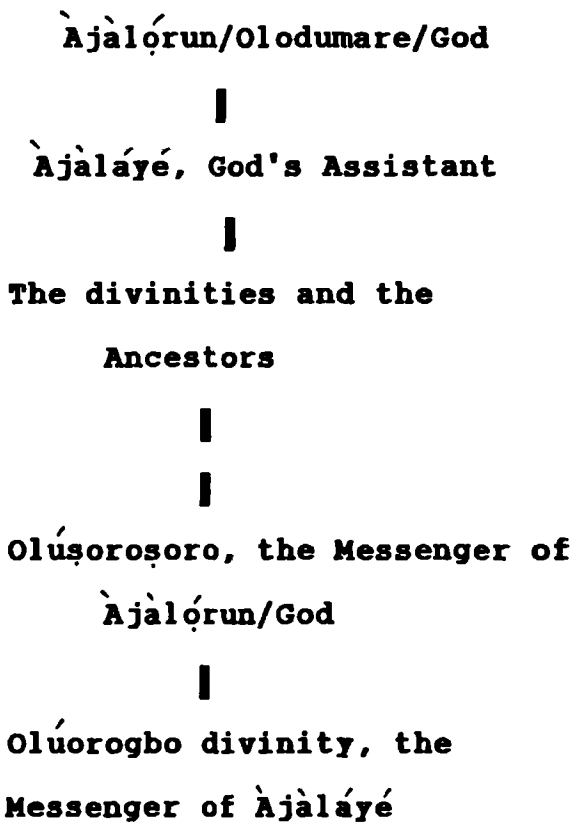
(b) The Heaven of Àjàlọ́run/Olodumare: It is unimaginable that God will share a domain with the ancestors and the divinities. Hence, the belief that God lives alone in this heaven, although heavenly beings from the other heaven do visit him from time to time.

From the Ifa verse known as *Òyèkú Pàlàbà* and from interviews conducted with Ifa priests, herbalists and the priests of the different *orisas* in Ile-Ifẹ,[28] Oluorogbo divinity and an heavenly being appear to be the key figures in the Ifẹ conception of heaven.

Oluorogbo divinity is regarded as the messenger of Àjàláyé, (assistant of Olodumare) while Olúṣoroṣoro is regarded as the messenger of Àjàlọ́run/Olodumare (God). Oluorogbo is said to be responsible for making the reports of all good and bad deeds a person does on earth to Olúṣoroṣoro, the messenger of Àjàlọ́run (God), who in

turn submits the reports to the inhabitants of the heaven of the ladder. The inhabitants of the heaven of the ladder pass these reports to God for safe-keeping until the death and arrival of the people whose names and deeds the records contained.

From these traditions, we see that heaven is believed to be organized in an hierarchical fashion as illustrated below:



The traditions help to explain the cosmology of the Ife and the belief about how God gets to know about the deeds of men. We will now look at the connection between the accounts of death and the worldview.

Relations Between the Accounts of Death and the Worldview.

Ile-Ife is known as *Ilúrun*, "the gateway to heaven " because it is believed by the Ifẹ and generally by the Yoruba that the dead passes through the City on his trip to heaven. (Ojo 1966:195). Ile-Ifẹ is thus the "last post" to heaven. Connected with this belief is the reasoning that as Ile-Ifẹ was held to be the site of creation and the original home of the major Yoruba divinities, it should also serve as the last port of call on the way to heaven. This line of thinking is supported by the belief that a water-well in Ile-Ifẹ actually leads to heaven (that is, if one gets into the well!). There is also a parallel belief by the Yoruba which states that the souls of all dead people end up at Ile-Ifẹ. (Aderẹmi 1937:6). Here, Ile-Ifẹ is seen not only as the way to heaven but as the ideal home of the dead.[29] Beliefs such as these used to discourage some Yoruba people from

visiting Ile-Ifẹ before the era of modern methods of communication and travel systems.

Methods of Study.

Three main methods were adopted for the collection of data for this thesis and they are the Participant Observation, the Interview Schedule and the Use of Secondary Sources.

Participant Observation: During the two periods of fieldwork, (May to November 1989 and August to September 1990), I was supported in the field by three field assistants. We participated in many of the funeral rites and observed some others.

The Interview Schedule: Structured and unstructured questions were asked from informants. Follow-up questions were also asked. Members of the various Cults of the divinities were interviewed, without the knowledge of the Priests. The Priests who were leaders of the Cults were interviewed afterwards. This was to help check the authenticity of the information elicited from the two groups. Ifa priests and men from many lineages were interviewed. Women were also interviewed individually and in groups of twos.

For both the Participant Observation and the Interview Schedule, note-taking was done in long-hand but a tape recorder was also used. Many sets of photographs and slides were produced.

Secondary Sources: Books, journal articles and archival materials were read.

The Aims of the Study: The thesis sets out to examine the burial rituals of the Ife of Southwestern Nigeria. The burial rites of men and women and the special roles of women in funerals will be studied. The thesis will discuss the importance of burial rites in Ile-Ife.

Previous Studies.

The earliest accounts of burial practices of the Yoruba appears to be that of Crowther (1844). Crowther writes: "The Yoruba have no particular burying place; each one buries his dead where he thinks proper, but a great regard is paid as to those who are buried in the bush, behind the walls of the house, or in the house itself, according to custom. The dead body of children, from a little infant to a child 12 or 13 years old is never buried in the town, but in the bush". In modern times, the situation is different as young children are

no longer buried in the bush but around the parents' homes.

Crowther goes on to explain why "*Adieh-iranna*, the fowl to purchase the way" is killed at burials: The fowl "is a passport at the different gates on their way in the invisible world. They believe the fowl always goes before the decease(d), by which he is recognized by the porter and is suffered to pass by without molestation". This belief is still held today.

The last section deals with the rites of mourning by widows. He writes: "After the separation of the dead, the widows now enter into *Ille-aweh*, the house of mourning: they neither shave nor plait their hair, nor wash a particular country cloth called *Ashoh-aweh*, the cloth of mourning, nor walk about the square during the day, unless on particular occasion, for the space of three months. This kind of mourning, which is in fact a kind of imprisonment, is to prevent other persons from taking an advantage of them or enticing them away". In Ile-Ife, widows stay indoors because of the reasons given by Crowther. But they also observe these rules because it is held that if they were to go out, they might see their deceased husband outside, waiting to talk to them or take them away.

Ellis (1894) describes the burial rites of the Yoruba much in the same way as Crowther. Important additions by Ellis include the destruction by burning of the "articles" of the deceased. Why? "Up to this point the soul of the deceased is supposed to have been lingering near his old home, and this destruction of his property is intended to signify to the soul that he must now depart, since there is no longer anything belonging to him". Properties of the dead are no longer destroyed and in Ile-Ife, I have never heard of any traditions of this ever taking place. It must have been a local tradition witnessed elsewhere by Ellis.

On the importance of the proper performance of burial and funeral rites, Ellis notes that: "It is considered the greatest disgrace to a family not to be able to hold the proper ceremonies at the death of one of their number, a notion which is comprehensible when we remember how much the welfare of the soul of the deceased is supposed to depend upon their performance". Even today, it is still considered a disgrace if the family could not celebrate the funeral in a proper manner.

James Johnson (1899) posits that the Yoruba have a "belief in a retributive providence, for good or evil". There is the "fear of social disgrace and punishment

which will fall upon an individual wrong and evil doer and his relatives and other connections also..". Johnson continues: "The soul of man is not liable to death. After death of body, it hovers about the earth for some time, departs into the world of the spirits above.."

Johnson describes the place "where the spirits of the dead go after death" as "spirit-world" or "heavens". He divides the heavens into two types. The first one is "*isalu ọrun*", the heaven of "sweet air.., heaven of peace and happiness, where the souls of all the good from this world are admitted and live after death". The second heaven is "*Ọrun apadi*", "world of potsherds, where spirits of the wicked pass to and live after death as a heap of refuse and rubbish, a mass of God-rejected souls". It is also known as *orun ihariha*, heaven of dry leaves...or the heaven where the spirits that go there are treated as such leaves". They are thrown "into the fire". Johnson concludes by saying that the "spirit of a good dead returns from the spirit world to be born again into this world..." There is also the idea of judgement by God.

Retributive judgement is still believed in by the Yoruba. So also are the beliefs about the soul being around for some time after death and the conditions in

heaven. But Johnson, an Anglican priest has mixed up Yoruba beliefs about punishment after death with the Christian beliefs about what takes place in hell. A glaring example is the imagery of fire.

On burial rites in Yorubaland, Dennett (1910) notes "On the evening before the burial, the son and daughter give money to buy a sheep or goat. Then they take the corpse to the grave, and having placed the body in it, the goat or sheep is killed over it, so that the blood falls upon it. The sons and daughters must weep so that their tears may also fall on the corpse. The grave is then filled in". These two rites of shedding blood and tears on the corpse are no longer in practice by ordinary people in Yorubaland, although members of some secret societies still engage in the practice of the first rite.

Samuel Johnson (1921) writes: "The graves of aged people are dug generally in the piazza or in one of the sleeping rooms. In the case of the wealthy dead, after the ground has been dug to a depth of about six feet in the piazza it is then carried on horizontally towards one of the bedrooms, so that the corpse is literally buried in the bedroom. ...If the family is wealthy, after a couple of months another ceremony is gone through, consisting chiefly of feasting and dancing in honour of

the dead, and this they term laying the dead upon its other side". Johnson goes on to describe the celebration of bringing out of the *egungun* of the dead and mourning rites performed by women.

Nowadays, the practice of burying the dead inside the bedrooms of the house has ceased[30] but all the other ceremonies are still celebrated. During the 19th Century and earlier this Century, writers such as Crowther, Ellis, James Johnson and others wrote about "bringing out of the *egungun* of the dead" as if the ceremony was a mandatory one at every funeral. It was not. *Egungun* of the dead is traditionally brought out (certainly in Ile-Ife and the areas around it) only in lineages where *egungun* festival is celebrated annually. But as for the Ọyọ and Egba areas, the situation is not entirely clear.

On burial rites performed for *àbíkú* children (who die in childhood), Farrow (1926) notes that "..in the event of death being attributed to *àbíkú* the body was formerly thrown into the bush, or hacked to pieces to destroy the evil spirit". Up till the first half of this Century, that was the popular practice. There has been a change and this will be discussed in passing in Chapter 6.

On the death of the old, Farrow observes that "the body is carefully washed by the mourning relatives, and all hair shaved off. It is then rubbed all over with camwood and water. ..The body having been clothed in its best garments, is laid on a mat. ...As the watching and mourning go on night and day, the funeral feast is continually kept up. Ample food is provided for the guests, and continual supplies of drink, native beer, palm wine, and trade gin and rum, are freely indulged in; but not by the chief mourners, who remain shut up in a neighbouring apartment". Feasting is still an important part of the funeral today. But an important point of divergence from the time of Farrow is that the "chief mourners" are never put in seclusion at the funeral of the old. In fact, they participate in the eating and drinking.

Farrow gives the reasons why "a great funeral" is accorded to the dead: "This is not entirely due to a feeling of pride, but to show due reverence to the deceased, for it is believed that the soul of the dead cannot attain to the realms of departed spirits, unless and until the body is duly and respectably buried; otherwise it wanders about, or hovers near the body, in terrible restlessness.." Other reasons which Farrow

missed out were: a proper funeral shows that the deceased is survived by children and ensures that the deceased will not trouble the living but will rather use his powers to benefit them.

On a final note, Farrow advances reasons why *Egungun* and *Oro* ceremonies are brought out at funerals: "..To comfort the mourners, and especially to confirm the women in the belief that the soul lives after death and goes to the abode of spirits.." Farrow has missed the main point here. The ceremonies are to reinforce the belief of the Yoruba, men and women, that life continues after death.

Delanọ (1937) describes, in passing, the burial rites of a leprosy victim: "A man who dies of leprosy wouldn't be buried. His relatives would pay certain charges in money, fowls, and animals to the professional undertakers in such cases, and the corpse after all the ceremony had been performed, would be burnt to ashes. We do not burn our dead except in such cases". This shows that the Yoruba have a knowledge of contagion. The point raised by Delano here about the Yoruba not burning the dead is still true today. Burning the dead will lead to the loss of the body and the grave; the consequences of such loss are discussed in this thesis. Besides, if the dead was burnt, there is the belief current in Yorubaland

that the deceased will be reborn with incomplete parts of the body.[31]

Bascom (1944) writes that "there are enough instances to indicate that the duty of the priests of the orishas to make *atonements* at the death of a worshipper is a common aspect of the orisha pattern of worship". "..in Ifẹ, it holds for Sọpọna, Orisanla *and others,* besides the secret *atonements* made by the *babalawo* at the death of one of their number".

Bascom goes on to specify roles played by specific priests of the orishas at burials in Ife: "The priests of several *orishas* bury anyone, including non-members, who have died under special circumstances. Àpatà, for instance, the chief priest of *Ẹ̀sìndálẹ̀,* buries all individuals who commit suicide by jumping into the air and landing on their head. This *striking the ground with the head (f(i) -orí sọ-(i)lẹ̀)* is not done from a height, but from the level of the ground. When such a suicide occurs, Apata buries the body after making a propitiation or *atonement (ètùtù)* so that others in the sib will not follow the example of the dead person".

Bascom continues: "*Apata* says that Esindale does not make people do this, but that they do it solely because they have become annoyed by something that has

happened. If the *atonement* is not made, however, others in the compound will be driven to commit suicide by the same method within three months. The goods of the deceased are confiscated by Apata and the clothes worn at the time of suicide are hung in the temple of *Esindale*".

Bascom writes further: "Olokore, the priest of *Obameri*, buries all individuals who have committed suicide by hanging. Every year at the festival, all those who sell sheep and goats bring a sheep to *Olokore* so that *Obameri* will not force them to hang themselves with the ropes with which they tether their animals. It is said also that any woman who dies is buried by the priests of *Orisanla*".

Bascom concludes by discussing the function of Oro at funerals in Ile-Ife: "*Obasao*, an Ife informant, states that the only function *Oro* has at funerals - and this is regarded as very humorous - is to remove the organs of a man who has been afflicted with large testicles (*epa*). This is done by the priests of *Oro* as an *atonement* so that others in the family will not suffer from the same disease, and is thus exactly paralleled by the *atonements* made by the *orisha* priests in deaths under special circumstances".

In modern times, however, there is an effective medical treatment for *ẹ̀pá/ìpá* thereby eliminating the burial functions of the *Ọbasao*. All the above-named priests still organize the burials as set out by Bascom. A detailed study of the principles which govern the burials with a specific example: that of a person killed by thunder and lightning will be made in Chapter 7.

Bascom failed to give the other important reason why the propitiation and *atonements* are made: to neutralize the pollution in the home of the deceased and purify the home and the mourners in it. This will be discussed at some length in Chapter 7.

Lucas (1948) describes funeral ceremonies in the same way as Crowther, James Johnson and Samuel Johnson. However, there were two important additions which Lucas made: the funeral ceremonies of *pẹ̀gbẹ́dà*[32] and the reason why a proper funeral is rendered for the deceased. On the *pẹ̀gbẹ́dà*, Lucas writes: "..A set of ceremonies known as *pegbeda*, "turning over from one side to the other". These ceremonies are performed periodically after a number of years following the death and burial of a deceased person. The relatives and friends of the deceased visit the cemetery or the grave on an appointed day and give offerings of food or flowers. They sometimes express

their wishes or prayers over the grave after summoning the deceased in whose honour the ceremonies were being performed to listen to them. This done, the family with their friends return to their house, and food and drinks are sumptuously provided.."

Lucas continues: "..The duty of a proper burial of the dead is regarded with great solemnity in Yorubaland. It is believed that those who fail to discharge it will suffer for their negligence; they will be haunted and pested by the restless disembodied spirit in various ways. On the other hand, it is considered a great misfortune for one to die in such circumstances as to miss a proper burial".

The *pẹ̀gbẹ́dà* is still celebrated today in Yorubaland by whoever can afford to do so, years after the death and burial of the deceased. The notion of *pẹ̀gbẹ́dà* "turning over from one side to the other" was probably derived from the Yoruba (and even universal) practice of turning from one side to the other while sleeping. That is to say that it is not convenient to sleep only on one side of the body throughout the night. The dead too will not like to sleep on only one side or on its back for ever; its side has to be turned for comfort. Hence, this commemoration ceremony is celebrated.

Delano (1937) describes the funeral ceremonies of *Iseku* among the Ẹgba Yoruba. "the ceremonies of *Iseku* which clearly demonstrate the faith of the Yorubas in resurrection is common to all religionists. It is usually the last and final ceremonies of burial, on the 40th day after the burial of the deceased. On that day the deceased is expected to *return* home to make some final pronouncements or state his last Will and Testament..The deceased may be an old man or a woman and age is determined by whether the deceased had a grandchild, or a marriage-able child capable of performing ceremonies connected with his parent's funeral or not. *Iseku* ceremonies are not performed for deceased young people". Someone who can copy "the gait, movement and characteristics of..the deceased person" will act as the dead person on the day of the *iseku* ceremony. He will also wear one of the dresses of the deceased.

Delano continues: "On the *Iseku* day the deceased goes straight to his apartment in the house and, in turn, visits the rooms of his wives and children, blessing, warning and revealing what he had in mind but was not privileged to say before he died...He blesses the women...The following morning the household meet in final prayers for the soul of the deceased person".

The *iseku* ceremony may still be celebrated among the Ẹgba Yoruba today, but in Ile-Ifẹ, Ilesa and Ekiti areas, it had never being a part of the funeral rites.

Willett (1959) describes a hunter's shrine in Ifetedo, near Ile-Ifẹ. A shrine, known as *Ipade* is always erected for an old, deceased hunter among the Yoruba, specifically for the oldest hunter in a locality. A carved figure of the hunter "is erected about three months after the hunter's death. It is set up before dawn, dane guns being fired while the figure is carried in procession to the site. A simple ceremony is performed, lasting about twenty minutes". All his medicines, charms, hunting gear, with some food and drink are put at the shrine. Libations are also poured on the shrine.

Willett observes that "nothing is buried at the site, nor is there any other ritual performed at a later date. It is evidently a simple form of second burial ceremony". Finally, Willett points out the importance of this rite: "The deceased is furnished with food and utensils for the journey from which he will not return, and from which, indeed, his survivors do not wish him to return. There does not, however, appear to be any conscious expression of this notions".

What Willett means by "he will not return" here is that the dead will not return to hunt with the living. By this rite, he is separated from the guild of hunters. This rite is still celebrated among the Yoruba.

Fagg (1959) discovered a similar hunter's shrine ("the hunter's memorial") at Gbọngan, "15 miles from Ife". It was "set up ...by a fork in the path in the direction most usually taken by the deceased hunter". It was "overgrown at the ground level". There were "various charms and other paraphernalia of kinds described by Willett being partially overlaid by vegetation". There was "a thin white cotton gown" and the hunter's "flywhisk is seen in position on the left shoulder" of the carved image. A similar rite like that described by Willett had obviously been performed for the deceased hunter.

Morton-Williams (1960a) gives the function of the second burial ceremony: "...the restructuring of the set of social relationships that had centred on" the deceased "during his life, and the general social recognition of his replacement by his heirs". He adds that this is one of the reasons why the second funeral ceremony is performed for both men and women. But men have an advantage over women: "..men may have *egungun* which guarantee them a social immortality. Women do not.

Ordinarily, a woman is assured of a form of immortality through her children... Socially, this ensures that the male ancestors dominate, at the cost of denying to women the assurance of distinctively individual immortality in any form except that of reincarnation in a descendant". The situation is still the same today. Women do not have *egungun* brought out for them.

Morton-Williams makes a passing comment (in 1960a) on the Yoruba secret society, Ogboni's view of death: "..in its elaborate ritual, *Ogboni* presents the image of the approach to death as a homecoming". He continues this theme of the Ogboni rites of death in (1960b) in "The Yoruba Ogboni Cult in Ọyọ": "Word is sent to the *Ogboni* priests as soon as the Ogboni is dead. They come to pray over the body before it is prepared for burial. It is then washed and dressed and placed in a grave in the house in the ordinary way. After dark on the second day, the cult members assemble for obsequies either in the compound or in an open place near by. When they have eaten and drunk well, and received gifts of money, very late in the night dancing begins. At that time, certain of the titled *Ogboni* officials shut themselves for a short time in the room where the grave is. The oldest child of the dead one may be allowed in with them for

only part of the rite. What they do in secret there has not be disclosed to me. When they have finished, the grave is filled. The dead one's hat and gown are hung on a post over the grave; they remain there for some days until his *egungun* appears wearing them in a rite that assures his children and widows that he is now an ancestor, watching over them".

Morton-Williams continues: "The Ogboni priest rejoins their fellows and the gathering sings a farewell song, *We are bringing him home, to become an earth-dwelling spirit....*"

Similar funeral rituals are still performed for deceased members of the Ogboni all over Yorubaland. In Ile-Ifẹ, the rites are performed for deceased members of the *Ilẹ́-Mọlẹ̀*[33] and the Reformed Ogboni Fraternity. The secret rituals done in the room with the dead are still not revealed to people and non-members still have no access. I interviewed some important Ogboni Chiefs and collected some data in the field about these burials in Ile-Ifẹ, but I have not written these up for the thesis as they add very little to the work of Morton-Williams.

Parrinder (1961) writes that: "When a Yoruba man dies, the Ifa oracle is consulted to see if the death was due to witchcraft. The corpse should not be touched till

this consultation is over, then it is washed and the hair shaved off". He continues, "..The sons stand with their backs to the grave and throw food of maize pap on to the coffin and pray to their father for blessing....The grave is filled in, still with the backs turned to it.."

On the burial rites of women, Parrinder writes: "When a woman dies, the relatives are told to prepare a miniature hearth in a calabash. The mourners take it into the bush, the woman's name is called out three times and a reply comes from the grove. An *Egungun* comes forward and receives the hearth, blessing the givers and returns. The hearth is later thrown into a river. (The hearth is the woman's special concern, and has respect shown to it during life, perhaps because of its connexion with fire and the centre of the home)".

Contrary to the assertion of Parrinder (who generalized about Ifa divination at the death of *a man*), the Ifa priest is never consulted when an old person dies as it is accepted that his allotted span of life has been completed. On the practice of sons turning their backs to the grave, it seems to have been a local practice at the town where Parrinder did his fieldwork. This practice is used in Ile-Ifẹ only at the burial of an Ifa priest.[34] The ritual of calling a deceased woman's name from the

grove (an obvious rite of separation from other women in the compound) also seems to be a local custom as it is not universally practised in Yorubaland.

Idowu's (1962) distinct contributions to the studies of Yoruba funerals are on two rites: *Biba oku yahun*, "Entering into a covenant with the deceased" and *Fifa Eegun oku wọle*, "Bringing the spirit of the deceased into the house". He gives details of the first rite as follows: "..The officiant now descends into the grave and performs the rite of slaying a victim, splitting the kola-nuts, and placing certain articles, including food and condiments beside the body. The rite is known as *Biba oku yahun* - "Entering into a covenant with the deceased". The essential part of this rite is therefore to say farewell to the deceased, impressing it upon him that now that he is no longer in his former earthly state, his duty is one of protection and care over his children, relatives, and associates; he is not to molest anyone or allow himself to be employed on any errand of malice; he is to go on now to partake of the blissful life of heaven, and not to be side-tracked into partaking of anything unworthy". This rite is now no longer performed when an ordinary person dies. Only members of the religious cults, Ifa priests and Yoruba Kings are now

accorded such burials. This change is discussed in Chapter 12.

Idowu describes the second rite as follows: "Several days after the burial, there is another rite known as *Fifa eegun oku wole - Bringing the spirit of the deceased into the house*. By this, it is believed, the survivors will again be able to have intimate intercourse with the deceased. The rites take place at night when all lights have been extinguished. As a result of it, a shrine is made in one corner or at the foot of the central wall of the house; this is a specific meeting-place between the deceased and his children. Thenceforth, there they go and make offerings to him, speak to him, beg special favours of him, enter into covenants with one another or swear over bones of contention". The use of such shrines will be discussed in Chapter 12.

Willett (1965) describes the *Ipade* ceremony of another hunter, this time from Ilode, Ile-Ife. He was a titled Chief and a hunter held in high regard "having killed an elephant". "The figure was carried in procession by the deceased's first-born son, together with the basket which his father had used to keep his hunting medicines in. The youngest child of the deceased carried a chicken. The hunters who took part in the

procession called out their greetings to the deceased "*O digba o*" ("Until then", *i.e.* when we meet in heaven). When the father answered (at the third call), the figure was put down on the spot with the basket and medicines in front of it, and the chicken was struck against the ground to kill it. It was then cut open, palm oil was poured over it, and it was laid on pieces of palm frond on the ground in front of the figure".

Willett continues "The lips of the figure were touched with a paste made from the meal which had been eaten during the wake the night before. This had been prepared from the dishes the deceased used to like..."

Willett comments on the importance of the ceremony and future commemoration of the deceased hunter: "The effect of the ceremony was to prevent the spirit of the deceased from haunting the living. He would be remembered again at Christmas (he was a Christian), an appropriate occasion for social events, when his friends would call at his house, and he would be commemorated too with other deceased hunters during the annual *Ọlọjọ* festival for Ogun, the patron divinity of hunters".

This ceremony is still celebrated today as described by Willett. It is celebrated as soon as an important hunter dies because of the fear that the dead may trouble

the living and the desire of the offspring to seek the help of the dead are important factors considered. Closely related with this rite is the rite of "Celebrating the *Ìpà Ọdẹ*" of deceased hunters,[35] irrespective of his age and the type of animals he had killed. Food, palm-wine, beer and other types of drinks are provided for the guild of hunters. They put the deceased's medicine-bag in the bush. The hunters beat *agere* drums, sing *ìjálá*[36] songs in honour of Ogun divinity and dance. By doing these, they separate the deceased hunter from the company of the living ones.

Ojo (1966) writes a short note on places of burial and location of tombs in Ado-Ekiti. He observes that "..there are the graveyards, invariably adjacent to the Church compounds, extensive in area marked out by brightly painted or whitewashed tombstones. In a different way, the townscape is broken up by tombs both in the front and back-yard, especially by the white sand-topped tombs of the departed Muslims. These modes of interring the dead are in complete contrast with those of traditional days which left no noticeable mark on either the townscape or the landscape.."

Ojo continues "..People below the rank of Ọba had different resting places. An elder was buried under the

roof, invariably along the veranda of the house in which he lived. A child was interred at the foot of the wall on the outside..." This subject will be discussed in some detail in this thesis.

Frank Willett (1966), on the use of burial effigies in Ọwọ and Benin, gives the purpose of *àkọ*: "..to emphasize the continuity of the Kingship even though the King may change, and for this purpose an effigy would serve just as well as the real body". Willett continues: "The effigy symbolises the dignitas of both the past and the future King, so that one might expect it to be a stylised representation.. It could be that naturalism comes in as the symbolic meaning is lost; as the sense of dignitas diminishes, so the idea of personal commemoration increases.." On the "life-size bronze heads of Ifẹ", Willett concludes that they "were used in some kind of second burial ceremony, probably not restricted to the King alone, but celebrated for all the most important title holders in the classical period.." In Ile-Ifẹ today, they are used only at the death of hunters and the King Ọọni.

Frank Willett, the Ifẹ archaeologist, writes about the burial sites of some of the past Kings of Ile-Ifẹ, (1967): "..Until recently the Ọnis were buried at Igbó

Òdì, outside the town wall to the south-east. Here there are about 30 to 40 mounds each reputed to be the burial place of an Ọni. This might indicate that the practice of royal burial which we have inferred at the Olokun Grove was abandoned a long time ago, but it was more likely that the second burial effigies were not buried in the same place as the bodies. The name Igbó Òdì means "secret grove", and it is a place which is still held in some awe. ..Until the middle of the 19th Century, ..the place where the Oni was buried seems to have been kept a secret".

In recent times, however, the Oonis were no longer buried at Igbó Òdì. Examples are the past two Ọọnis, *Ọba* Ademiluyi (died 1930) and *Ọba* Adereẹmi (died 1980) who were both buried around the Palace in Ile-Ifẹ.

Harold Turner (1967) writes about the funeral rites of members of the Church of the Lord-Aladura. The funeral practices of the *Aladura* of Yorubaland begins with the wake-keeping "on the first night after a death". "After these informal social and religious activities the coffin is taken in funeral procession direct to the place of burial and never into the Church". The reason for this rule was explained to Turner by Adejọbi, the leader of the Church: "Dead bodies are not allowed in our Church as

corpses are rank filth before God. There is no forgiveness in the grave. And I heard a voice saying, *The beautiful feathers of the bird Agbe cease to adorn when it dies. There is no more respect for the body that puts on Death*".

Turner continues: "The members of the Church accompany the coffin in funeral procession to the grave, wearing their white uniforms and singing choruses and hymns, with drumming and dancing as they march. The note of joy predominates unless the death has been a *bad* one, either premature or by misadventure. The burial may be anywhere sanctioned by local custom, and any minister may conduct the service. Traditional customs at the graveside that may have pagan significance are discouraged". The rites are still performed by the *Aladura* as Turner described them.

Daramọla and Jeje (1967) note that the rites of washing the body and shaving of the head of a deceased man and body-washing and plaiting of the hair of a deceased woman are done to ensure that the dead do not arrive in heaven with unclean bodies. The authors also give the reason why red clothes are not used to wrap or bury the dead: if it were to be used, the dead may be

reborn as a leper. These customs are still observed today.

Bascom (1969a) sums up the fate of condemned persons such as suicides, criminals or wicked persons. "..Suicides never reach heaven and, having renounced earth, belong to neither; they cling to the treetops like bats or butterflies...Criminals and wicked persons are condemned to the bad heavens (*ọrun bubúrú*) which is described as hot like pepper and is sometimes spoken of as the *heaven of potsherds* (*ọ̀run àpádìì*), referring to something broken beyond repair, for they cannot be restored to the living through reincarnation".

Ray (1976:144); Awolalu (1980:32) and Parrinder (1972:50) also describe the bad heavens in a similar way. By using the imagery of "hot" and "potsherds", they are not actually describing the beliefs of the Yoruba about the lot of bad people and their situation in heaven. The bad ones are rather believed to be turned to animals, plants or trees in another lifetime.

Bascom (1969b) briefly describes a funeral ritual (performed for a deceased woman) known as "Tears of Morning": "In the morning, the wives of the Compound into which she was married eat together and bring large calabashes, which they beat as drums, and dance. Later in

the day her eldest child provides a sheep which is killed, cooked, and given with some other foods to the wives to eat, after which they resume dancing and singing in honour of her children. This ritual is thought of as a woman's last meeting with the women with whom she has lived since marriage".

The rite of "tears of morning" is the most important ceremony performed for a deceased woman. It is described in detail in this thesis in Chapter 8. The singing at the rite is not only in honour of the deceased's children as Bascom said, but most importantly, they are sung in honour of the ancestors of the lineage into which the woman was married.

Bascom's classification of Yoruba funerals into two types is indeed very appropriate. They are the "grieving" and the "celebrating" types. The feature of the grieving type is that "one grieves at the death of a relative who is younger than himself"; at the celebrating type, one "joins those who celebrate the death of elder relatives..". Here, "...the festive mood predominates. ..This is related to the idea that one should be happy when a person has had children and has lived to a ripe old age.."

Bascom concludes that "many of the rituals associated with burial are intended to: insure that the deceased will be reborn again; protect members of the sub-clan from following him to the grave, or to prevent his soul from troubling his descendants".

Observers of Yoruba funeral customs might be surprised with the series of rites celebrated. Maclean (1974), in passing, notes the social significance of these ceremonies: "...the social reinforcement which can come out of a more deliberate confrontation of chaos... The Yorubas, for example, with their elaborate and repeated funeral ceremonies, use the occasion as a means of stressing the continuity of the generations and, in emphasizing their reverence for the ancestors, they take away from individuals some of the horror which death inevitably holds".

Apart from classifying death into two broad categories (the good and the bad), and describing the festivities at the funeral of the old, Ọlatunji (1975) describes the process of distributing the properties of the deceased among his children. The properties are divided into the number of wives of the deceased. The first child of each wife picks up a portion which is further divided among his or her siblings. This system of

distribution is one of the methods still used by the Yoruba. This is discussed in Chapter 5.

Abiọdun (1976) was written as a rejoinder to Willett (1966). Abiọdun notes that the *àko,* (the celebration of the second burial effigy), "is the highest and the most honourable burial that can be performed for any individual, other than the special case of the Ọlọwọ". He continues "In preparation for *ẹhin-iwa* (after life), the *ako* is of great importance. ..The *ako* institution creates a situation whereby a symbolic elevation of the social and material status is possible. A total reconstruction of the physical, social and psychological identity of the deceased takes place through the *ako* effigy which employs a controlled *ako*-type naturalism sanctioned by tradition which already provides a *vocabulary* for this style. The ako device makes it possible for the distinguished dead to enter into *orun* and start the *after-life* with assured success". Effigies are only made for deceased hunters and the King in Ile-Ife.

Davis (1977) writes on the use of *egungun* at funerals. At Origbo, near Ile-Ifẹ, *Egungun* masqueraders "impersonated deceased persons" at funerals. ..The *egungun* who appeared to impersonate the deceased persons during these ceremonies were regarded as sacred beings.

They represented the spirits of the recently dead, reincarnated in materialized form as *Egungun*. Such *egungun* are accorded great respect and are hailed with the *oriki* (praise-poems) of the dead persons. They acted like the deceased, assuming their peculiar voices and mannerisms. They invoked blessings on their assembled relatives and friends and tried to console the bereaved".

Davis continues "One of the functions of funeral rites such as *Oku yiya* and *Igbaaro* where *egungun* appeared and impersonated the deceased was to release the spirit of the latter from earthly physical ties... Such ceremonies served to make the separation of the deceased from their loved ones much easier for the living to bear. The parting was not abrupt, so the shock and grief were controlled".

Davis concludes: "Such rites stressed that this was the last physical appearance of the deceased on earth - the final physical separation which the relatives had to accept. But in his form as an *egungun*, they were reminded that this physical separation was not the ultimate end of their loved one. The spirit of the deceased would henceforth guide and guard his relatives left on earth; and in the case of deceased male members of the *egungun* cult, would appear as an *egungun* at subsequent annual

egungun festivals. Thus, the fundamental Yoruba belief in the continuing close relationship between the dead and the living was reinforced through such rituals".

In Yorubaland generally and in Ile-Ifẹ in particular, the *egungun* is also used at funerals for the reasons given by Davis. The use of the *egungun* at funerals in Ile-Ifẹ will be discussed only briefly in this study.

Following the example of Arnold van Gennep, Ray (1976) delineates Yoruba eschatology into a "threefold process" of separation, transformation and incorporation. The burial ceremony is held to separate "the soul of the deceased from the family" and to give "expression to the family's desire for its continued interest and protection".

On the use of naturalistic mask or effigy at funerals, Lawal (1977) writes: "By and large, the use of a naturalistic mask or effigy during the second-burial ceremonies is not only to mark the last physical appearance of a departing soul on earth, but also to demonstrate that he has *changed position* (*pa ipò dà*), and to impress upon the soul of the deceased - if he is watching the ceremony - that, having cast off his earthly mask, he must now proceed to heaven to join the souls of

his predecessors and team up with them to help the living".

Masks and effigies are carved and used all over Yorubaland when an important person or dies. Examples of people commemorated in that way are hunters who had killed large animals. (Willett 1965). The past Kings of Ile-Ife, (the Ọọnis) were also commemorated with naturalistic effigies when they died. (Willett 1967: 27 & 131).

For comparative purposes, the burial rites of a Yoruba Muslim as witnessed by Ryan (1978) is reviewed here. The *alfa* describes the details for Ryan: "Before they remove the corpse (from the house) they send for the *alfa* to come because so-and-so has died.. When all the neighbours have gathered together they dig up the ground and they wash [the corpse] in the *wonka*... When a Muslim dies they go and buy six yards of white cloth and they sew it; they also make a cap-like cover for the head. After sewing it, they put the cap on to cover the head and they put the loin cloth on him. After this they take the white cloth they have sewn and they use it to wrap him up, tying it in seven places. When the corpse has been put into the grave that has been dug, all the strings are cut that have been used to tie it and they

cover the corpse with earth... When the burying is finished they ask the *alfa* to help them pray for [the dead person], that God may pardon [the deceased's] sins. The sons of the deceased then put money in the covered dishes...for the *alfa* to help them make prayer for [the deceased]. After this prayer they give food to the *alfa* and everybody goes home".

Ryan further notes that "the actual funeral services of the Ansar-Ud-Deen and Nawair-Ud-Deen Societies consist of the orthoprax *salat al-janazah* interspersed with Arabic petitionary prayer. At the graveside each Society begins and ends by reciting its Society Gloria and prayer. The Ansar-Ud-Deen proceed immediately to the casting of dust into the grave, a rite performed by the Nawair-Ud-Deen somewhat later. Both groups recite the *Surat Ya Sin* (Qur'an 36), a section of the Qur'an associated with prayer for the dead". The rites have continued to be celebrated among Yoruba Muslims as recorded by Ryan.

Awolalu (1979) writes on the burial of the old: "..Just before sunset, the dancing stops and the corpse, wrapped in a beautiful heavy clothing and a special mat, is conveyed in a solemn procession to the grave. It is carefully laid, with every part of the body well placed.

Beautiful clothing, pieces of silver, money and all that the departed is expected to require in the next world are provided..". In modern times, the body is no longer wrapped in a mat. Goods are also no longer put in the grave for fear of grave robbers.

Awolalu's (1980) distinct contributions to the subject of Yoruba funerals are as follows. "..In very early days, graves were dug inside the house and in particular rooms; but that practice has changed. Graves are now usually dug in the family compounds. To the Yoruba, to bury somebody in the common cemeteries is to cast him out and to lose contact with him because regular ancestral veneration which involves pouring libations, breaking kolanuts, and praying at the deceaseds' graves would not be convenient and domestic.." Awolalu adds that the Yoruba "employ" the *egungun* "as a means of protesting against death". A study of the location and importance of graves among the Yoruba will be discussed in Chapter 4.

McClelland (1982) writes on the funeral rites of the old as follows: "If a deceased person is old, there is no sadness. Indeed, it is an occasion for rejoicing. It is supposed that the dead man or woman has completed his time on earth and that he has reached the date assigned,

before his birth, for his return to the afterlife. He will be buried with honour by his relatives. Because his spirit will remain in the house for some days after the death of the body, he must lie in state on a mud dias for at least two, and often as many as seven, days.." Nowadays, it is now unusual for the body to be kept in the house for seven days. We will say more about this in Chapter 5.

Ajuwon (1982) writes on *Ìrèmọ̀jé*, the funeral dirges of Yoruba hunters. Ajuwon asserts that "*iremoje* is chanted only as a rite of passage at the death of hunters...*Iremoje* can only be chanted at night and in front of the house of a deceased hunter;..the themes of lament, death and loss pre-dominate".[37]

The purposes for which the ritual is performed are: "In obedience and honour of Ogun, the Yoruba hunters' god.. It provides the hunters' guild with an opportunity to bid their departed fellow hunters farewell. ..It represents to the Yoruba hunters a final separation of the deceased hunter from the earthly hunters' guild, and serves as a reference for his admission into the heavenly hunters' guild. It is the hunters' belief that once the deceased hunter formally loses his membership in the hunters' guild, he shall no longer hunt with the living

hunters. And since it is a bad omen for the dead to hunt together with the living, a final separation must be effected. The performance of the hunters' funeral dirges is therefore essential. The ceremony affords the chanters the opportunity to evaluate the successes and failures of the departed hunter in his hunting career on earth. It serves as an emotional outlet".

This ceremony and the *Ipade* rituals described by Fagg (1959); Willett (1959 & 1965) together with the second funeral ceremonies celebrated by the family of the deceased hunter make up the full funeral rites of an important hunter among the Yoruba. The *Iremọje* ceremony shows the belief of the Yoruba about the dead continuing its earthly occupation in heaven.

On the burial rites of members of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church (C & S), Omoyajowo (1982) writes "None of the sections of the C & S permit corpses in the house of prayer. God they say is the God of the living and not of the dead. The band to which the deceased belonged is charged with the responsibility of dressing his body, normally in the robes of his office, or, alternatively, in white praying-gown with white socks, veil and gloves. A short service of prayer is held in the house of the deceased before conveying his body to the cemetery for

interment. The graveyard service is the same as the Anglican".

It is interesting to note the different reasons why members of the Church of the Lord-*Aladura* (H.W. Turner 1967) and the C & S (Omoyajowo 1982) do not allow corpses to be taken into their Churches. For the former, it is for the avoidance of pollution and for the latter, it is because God "is the God of the living and not of the dead". Death pollution is feared by the Yoruba as it could be the cause of misfortune. This will be discussed in Chapter 11.

Mckenzie (1982) gives a comprehensive summary of traditional Yoruba funeral rites as contained in James Johnson (1899); S.A. Crowther (1844); Lucas (1948); Morton-Williams (1960a & 1960b); Idowu (1962 & 1973); Bascom (1969a & 1969b) and Ray (1976). He also describes some early Christian burial practices in the 19th Century.

An important contribution however, is his short description of the women's rite of passage known as "tears of mourning" and the conflict caused between the Church and a woman by its celebration. McKenzie writes: "..The other area of traditional Christian interaction was in connection with women's funeral rites, in

particular with the rite known as *tears of mourning* where the women of the compound have a communal meal, then beat calabashes as drums and dance together in honour of a female deceased. This traditional wake was on one occasion celebrated by a group of Methodist and Anglican women from Sierra Leone. The Methodist woman whose deceased mother being thus honoured was publicly dismissed from her congregation. ..these women, so severely condemned by their male leaders, were attempting to retain elements of the traditional service that ministered to their deepest feelings.."

The situation has now changed. In Ile-Ife, women celebrate the rite but the Church (whether Anglican, Methodist, Baptist or even the *Aladuras*) do not interfere. The rise of the indigenous Churches has put a stop to harsh punitive measures used by the early missionaries. For if the Western-oriented Churches were to revert to such practices, most of their members will leave to join the indigenous Churches where there is also the added benefit of visions.

Doi (1984) describes the burial rites of a Yoruba Muslim in the same way as Ryan (1978), but his distinct additions are as follows. "After the burial, the religious leaders congregate in front of the deceased's

house to offer prayers and to give injunctions on funeral ceremonies to his children. Money is collected from all the children and relatives before prayers are offered. This is done by all members of the family to placate the spirit of the dead so that it may not come back as a dissatisfied spirit.."

Doi continues: "Then the *Imam* or his representative admonishes the children of the deceased and reminds them of what the *Shar`iah* says about Muslim funerals, notably that they should avoid the use of wine; there should be no drumming; alms should be given on behalf of the deceased to effect repose of his soul, and that they should avoid excessive spending in entertaining visitors. It is a common belief that *Saraa* meaning "alms", if not adequately given out, they incur the anger of the ancestor whose soul will not repose in heaven and will constantly invade his former home on earth".

This link between the giving of *Sàráà* and the state of the soul can be compared to the traditional Yoruba beliefs about rendering a proper funeral to the deceased so that among other things, the soul will not trouble the family. (Bascom 1969b:69).

On the burial rites of the victim of smallpox (*Sọnpọnnọ*)[38] and how the family should behave, Buckley

(1985b) writes "..the burial of a *Ṣonpọnnọ* victim is said to be performed secretly by the priests of *Ṣonpọnnọ*. If the family should wish to mark the death with drumming and dancing, they will usually postpone the festivities until a time when *Ṣonpọnnọ's* immediate threat has receded".

Buckley continues: "..When *Ṣonpọnnọ* kills a person, no one should rejoice. For if there are any (funeral) celebrations he will be annoyed that despite the evil he has done to these people, they are still happy. He will then affect many other people. God has given *Ṣonpọnnọ* such a power that if he kills in anyone's family, they must not be angry but must instead be thanking *Ṣonpọnnọ* or else he will be angry that people are not aware of the evil that he has done. This is why people usually call *Ṣonpọnnọ* "*Ala.padupẹ*" ("the owner of kill and thank"). Anyone that *Ṣonpọnnọ* kills, we should not say that he died, but rather "*o yo lo*" ("he rejoiced and went"), but if it is said that the person died, (*o ku*) *Ṣonpọnnọ* will be annoyed that people are calling him a murderer (*apaiọ*)".

Afflictions of Ṣonpọnnọ, smallpox has reduced dramatically in Southern Nigeria because of the vaccination programme of the 1960s and the 1970s. The

practice of burying the corpses of people who died of smallpox in the forest still continue today because the people seem to have understood the notion of contagion. The priests of Sonponno are responsible for the burials. It is a paradox that Sọ̀npọ̀nnọ́, who is also known as *Ọlúayé* is the dreaded god who afflicts man with smallpox but is also credited with making certain individuals he likes to become wealthy. There is the belief that he does this by mystically giving "bags of money" to them as gifts.[39]

Drewal and Drewal (1990) treat briefly the practice of *Gelede* masquerades being used for funeral celebrations and commemorations. When used for commemorations, masqueraders sing the praises of the deceased, comparing him with a buffalo or an elephant, which are important and "powerful animals". Other songs bid a deceased woman farewell on "her journey home to the afterworld". But when used for funeral celebrations, the Drewals note that: "..Frequently a pair of special *Gẹlẹdẹ* masks are commissioned for these funeral performances, often with a figure of the deceased shown in a characteristic activity or attitude". Gẹlẹdẹ is not brought out at funerals or at any other time in Ile-Ifẹ.[40] But it is used elsewhere in Yorubaland, particularly in the Ẹgbado areas.

Barber (1991) says that funeral ceremony in Okuku (a Yoruba town) has "dramatic stages" and is "enacted principally through *oríkì*[41] chants". It is an "expression of different philosophies, offering, at different moments, different views of what the dead are and where they go". In the chants, "at some moments, the deceased is addressed as a corpse, an object of fear and mystical danger; ..other utterances are addressed not to the deceased as an individual, but to him or her as part of a collectivity of ancestors".

Barber continues: "..Some of the *oríkì* are addressed to the *ọmọ olóòkú*[42] they have left behind; some to the relatives who have preceded them to the other world and who are pictured as waiting there to receive them; others again to an abstract entity, as much as person, which represents the past and its inhabitants in a generalised way. ..Without *oríkì*, a funeral could hardly take place".

Barber observes that if the deceased was "old enough to have grown-up children and grandchildren, the death is made public by *ìtufọ̀*, (a formal announcement to the Ọba). ..After this, the chanting of *oríkì* and lamentation begins in real earnest, and continues for seven days more or less continuously".

Barber then discusses the funeral of a female Sango worshipper named Efuntohun. Firstly, she describes a woman's position in the Okuku society before and after death: "Even in death, the ambivalence of a woman's position, born into one lineage and married into another, is not resolved. At the begining of the chant, Ẹfuntohun has been *summoned* by the Enikoyi, her own lineage ancestors, to rejoin them; but throughout the rest of the chant she is pictured as being reclaimed by her dead husband, and belonging to the collective male elders of his lineage".

Secondly, Barber gives a detailed picture of the burial rite: "..the power-giving ritual substance that had been implanted in her scalp on her initiation half a century before (the *òṣù*)" is removed "behind closed doors". Chants in honour of the god Sango known as *Ṣàngó pípè* are rendered. In these chants, there is a "stress on her personal character, her role in the cult; her relationship with other cult members already dead, whose *oriki* are added; and above all the terrifying nature of a cult death and the rituals associated with it". The members of the Sango Cult, "the Onisango", "are there to activate the dead, to move her on to the next stage of

her journey away from the world of the living...like a bride, going on a transition.."

When the corpse has been "sufficiently viewed, the Baale Sango and Elemeso Sango, went ahead to bury a calabash containing the dead woman's *òṣù*, cut from her scalp, together with other ritual substances".

In Ile-Ifẹ too, the chanting of *oriki* is an indispensable part of the funeral. At the funeral of a woman in Ile-Ifẹ, the *oriki* of her lineage is chanted and in modern times, printed in the programme of burial service distributed in the Church, if she was a Christian. At the same time, the *oriki* of her husband's lineage is recited in her honour and in the honour of the ancestors of her husband. But at the *ẹkún òwúrọ̀* rite celebrated for her by the wives of the lineage, no reference is ever made to her own lineage *oriki*. All the songs are sung in her honour, her children's honour and in honour of the ancestors of the husband.

Barber also describes the traditional funeral ceremony of a member of the Ẹ̀ṣọ́ Ìkòyí lineage. A similar rite takes place at Ile-Ifẹ. A detailed study of the rite in Ile-Ifẹ can be found in Chapter 9.

M.T. Drewal (1992) writes on the burial rituals of the Ijẹbus in Yorubaland. She notes that "Yoruba peoples

of Southwestern Nigeria conceive of rituals as journeys - sometimes actual, sometimes virtual. In elaborate funeral rituals, the elders transfer the deceased's spirit to its otherworldly domain, ...the ritual is successful only if the participants fulfil or complete all the stages of the ritual structure".

On the funeral of the old, Drewal observes that "the actual interment of the corpse is a preliminary event to the funeral process. Other activities include: ..setting the date of the funeral; seven-day program; ..the main or *first*, funeral day of ritual (*ọjọ isinku*); ..the third day, for feasting (*ita oku*); the fourth day (a public celebration or day of play)..; seventh and final celebration day (*ijeku*).."

Drewal concludes by saying that "both play and competition were built into the structure of performance. Not merely a display of wealth for its own sake, the funeral literally constructs the social significance, power, and prestige of the deceased and his or her family at the same time that it constructs for the family and community a representation of the quality of the deceased's existence in the otherworld.."

At funerals in Ile-Ife too, we find this element of competition. The amount of money spent by the children

and relatives of the deceased is estimated by the sympathizers and other guests. This is compared with the estimate of their incomes and their social standing in the society. This will show whether they are misers or generous spenders. At the same time, the children of the deceased are in competition with one another and each strives to spend more money on the funeral than the others so as to earn the praise of guests and other relatives.

Summary:

The Yoruba people live in Southwestern Nigeria, speak the Yoruba language and number about 9 million. All the Yoruba groups trace their origin to the ancient City of Ile-Ifẹ. Ile-Ifẹ is believed to have been the site where black, white and people of other races were created.

The main occupation of adult males in Ile-Ifẹ is farming and the main occupation of women is trading. But there are also blue and white-collar workers and people in craft occupation. Each lineage is headed by the *Baálé* and the women of each lineage are headed by the *Ìyàálé*. There are many types of chieftaincies in Ile-Ifẹ. Example are the Town Chiefs (who control the main wards of Ifẹ);

the Palace Chiefs (who help the King and run errands for him) and the *Ìsòrò* Chiefs (who, as the religious priests worship the various divinities).

The *Ọ̀ọ̀ni* of Ifẹ sits on the throne of Oduduwa and is regarded as the father of the Yoruba race, in both the political and the spiritual sense. Oduduwa is believed to have descended from heaven with the other divinities. He was the creator of dry land. Ọbatala was said to have moulded man with clay. The most important divinities in Ifẹ are Oduduwa and Obatala. The Ọlọjọ and the Edi festivals are the most popular ones in Ifẹ and are well attended annually.

It is believed that there are three spheres of existence: the world, *Ilé Ayé*; earth, *Inú Ilẹ̀*, and heaven, *Ọ̀run*. Ile-Ife is believed by the Yoruba to be a "last post" on the way to heaven. A parallel belief also states that the souls of all deceased people end up at Ile-Ifẹ.

The methods used for the collection of data for this thesis are the Participant Observation, Interview Schedule and the use of Secondary Sources. The aims of the study are the analysis of the burial rituals of the Ifẹ and the special roles of women in funerals.

In Chapter 2, the beliefs of the Yoruba about death will be discussed.

Endnotes:

[1]. Ford (1951:1). He notes that those in Sierra Leone are known as the Aku and that descendants of Yoruba can also be found in Jamaica, Cuba, Brazil, Trinidad and other Islands in the Carribean. See also Bascom 1951d; 1969b:2 and Smith 1969:9.

[2]. Fagg & Willett (1960:33) call this "some diffusion of cultures from Ife".

[3]. Ile-Ife, Oyo State Town Series, No.7/14, 1977:5. (Will be subsequently cited as Ile-Ife).

[4]. Farrow 1926:17.

[5]. Eluyemi, *ibid*; Fasogbon 1985:2; Idowu 1962:15.

[6]. Farrow 1926:18; Abraham 1958:278. Hence, the peculiar appellations of the city of Ile-Ife : "Ile-Ife, the original home of all things, the place from where the day dawns, the holy city, the home of divinities and mysterious spirits, the source of all oceans...." (Fashogbon 1985:1).

[7]. Ile-Ife, *ibid*. Smith puts the current population at 150,000. (1969:22).

[8]. Ile-Ife, *ibid*.

9. Bascom 1969b:18; Town Series, p. 6; Fabunmi 1985:98.

10. Source: Bascom 1969b:33, Ile-Ife, p. 8; Fashogbon 1985:32.

11. See Fashọgbọn 1985:21-30 for a list of Chieftaincies.

12. See Fabunmi 1985:81-84.

13. Aderẹmi 1937:4; Fabunmi 1976:18 & 19; Willett 1960:231).

14. Aderẹmi 1937:3. But Apata, the Priest of Ẹsindalẹ was of the view that Ẹsindalẹ divinity was Ojùmu who helped Oduduwa in the work of creating land. (Personal communication, 26th August, 1990 at Ile-Ife).

15. Fabunmi 1985:14; Fashọgbọn 1985:1; Idowu 1962:19-22. See Beier 1955:18 for a comparative analysis of creation myths.

16. Beier 1960:34 and Stevens 1966:185.

17. On the *ẹni òrìsà*, Beier (1955:23) observes that "The Yoruba, however, by attributing their origin to the creator god himself, have safeguarded the social position of these unfortunates, who are given a special position in his shrines".

18. Hence, the Yoruba word for "whites": *òyìnbó*, "..this man has been bleached by the long exposure to the temperate or cold climate". (Fabunmi 1976:19).

[19]. The location of the different shrines can be found in Fabunmi 1969a.

[20]. The name means "He-Who-Redeemed-the-Ifẹ". (Stevens 1966:196).

[21]. Chief Apata, Priest of Ẹsindalẹ, 26th August 1990 at Ile-Ife by personal communication.

[22]. Priest of Ọbameri, Personal communication on 21st August, 1990 at Ile-Ife.

[23]. From an Ifa verse known as *Òyèkú Pàlàbà*. It was recited for me by Chief 'Tunji Adeyẹfa, Ifa Priest by personal communication on 20th August, 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ.

[24]. Chief Tunji Adeyẹfa, Ifa priest, by personal communication on 20th August, 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ.

[25]. See Appendix.

[26]. On a view of who the Ìgbò were, see Beier (1956b:28-29).

[27]. For two interesting accounts of the Edì festival, see Walsh 1948:231-238 and Willett 1967:122-123.

[28]. The interviews were held between 20th and 22nd August 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ.

[29]. See also Idowu 1962:14.

[30]. This will be discussed in Chapter 12.

[31]. Personal communication, Chiefs 'Tunji Adeyẹfa, M.O. Fashọgbọn and M.A. Fabunmi; Various dates between 4th July and 30th September 1989 at Ile-Ifẹ.

[32]. S. Johnson (1921) briefly mentioned this ceremony that it was celebrated after a few months of the death of the old. Lucas' account (1948) goes further giving much details and emphasizing that it could be celebrated even years after the death.

[33]. This is the traditional Ogboni of Ifẹ town. It had wide ranging powers in the past. The King Ooni is a member. See Bascom 1969b:36-37.

[34]. Chief 'Tunji Adeyẹfa, Ifa Priest, Personal communication, 12th August 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ.

[35]. Ajuwọn describes this as *Ìrèmòjé*. See Ajuwọn 1982:1-2).

[36]. These are songs rendered by hunters. The songs contain the deeds of Ogun divinity. See Babalọla (1966) for examples of such songs. But for songs which are rendered only at at the *Ìpà Ọdẹ* ceremony of a deceased hunter, see Ajuwọn (1982).

[37]. See also Ajuwọn 1989.

[38]. The divinity responsible for afflicting people with the illness is also known by the name *Sọnpọnnọ*.

[39]. He is said to be closely related to Ogun divinity and his emblem is always placed at the shrine of Ogun. (Chief Osogun, the Priest of Ogun divinity, Personal communication, 26th January, 1988 at Ile-Ifẹ).

[40]. On *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́* and its uses, see Beier 1958:5-7.

[41]. Barber (1991:1) defines *oriki* as "a genre of Yoruba oral poetry that could be described as attributions or appellations: collections of epithets, pithy or elaborated, which are addressed to a subject". Barber adds that it is women who perform *oriki* in Okuku.

[42]. This means "the children of the deceased".

CHAPTER 2.

YORUBA BELIEFS ABOUT DEATH.

In this chapter, the beliefs of the Yoruba about death will be discussed. Various beliefs underlie the Yoruba conception of death and the hereafter. Death is regarded as a personified being among the Yoruba. He is known as "Ikú" (Abraham 1958:298-299), and he is the agent who kills humans."Ikú" is also known by various other names such as "Àlùbínìti","Ọjèṣgbé", and "Ejié"[1]. In one verse from Ifa recited by a titled Ifa priest, Chief 'Tunji Adeyẹfa, "Ikú" Death is regarded as a powerful being who descended from heaven or the sky-world (ọ̀run) with all the divinities at the time of creation.

One myth related by the well known Ifẹ traditional historian, Chief M.O.Fashọgbọn[2] portrays death as an unseen, invisible spirit which human beings cannot see with their ordinary eyes. He adds that Ikú (death) and the earth (ilẹ̀) were once ordinary physical beings who once lived on earth before man was created. Ikú(death) was the agent of God (Olodumare/Ọlọ́run) who was sent to fetch some soil from the earth (Ilẹ̀). But earth (ilẹ̀) pleaded with Death not to do that as it might affect its well-being. When Death got back to Olodumare, he presented the soil but he was asked if

Earth pleaded with him. He replied in the affirmative, but was quick to say that he did not heed the pleas. Olodumare then gave Orisa-nla (Yoruba Arch-divinity) the task of moulding man. Olodumare thereafter gave the gift of breath into those images who then became humans. (Idowu 1962:71-75; Abraham 1958:502).

Olodumare then charged Death with the responsibility of taking away the life of man, this is the situation known today as death. Death was reported to have complained that the job was too much for him. Olodumare gave him special assistants in the form of different diseases and illnesses who He described as the messengers (*ikọ̀*) of Death. These agents therefore help Death with the process of taking away the breath of man. Earth (*ilẹ̀*) was also charged with the responsibility of sustaining man and receiving the bodies of the victims killed by Death.

In a long Ifa verse (from the Odu known as Ògúndá Ketẹ̀) recited for me by the Ifa priest[3] mentioned earlier, we see death portrayed as the bearer of three clubs which are essentially his weapon for killing man. The verse also tells us the steps followed by Death in his profession, and how the practice of appeasing Death with animals really began. In the Ifa verse, Death is shown as one of the divinities who used to hold periodic meetings hosted by each

of the divinities in turn. The divinity hosting each meeting is under the obligation to provide lots of food and drinks. Death attended all the meetings, participated in the eating and drinking but did not host any of the meetings. The tortoise (àjàpá) who was their attendant asked Death to host a meeting. Death then decided to kill him. Tortoise was saved from sudden death by the sacrifice which he offered.

Certain facts about Yoruba beliefs on the nature of Death can be deduced from this Ifa verse. Firstly, Death is believed to be a divine being, not only by man but also by the divinities because of the power which Death has over the devotees of those divinities. Secondly, Death is believed to make effective use of three magical clubs (*kùmọ̀*) which when invoked and thrown by Death never fail to hit an intended victim. Thirdly, Death possesses this dreaded power which was given to him at the time of creation (*ìgbà ìwásẹ̀*) by God (*Olodumare*). Fourthly, the distance between the location of Death and an intended victim is immaterial. Death has the power to kill by sending these clubs into the seas, different towns, cities and continents in the world. Finally, death can be appeased[4] by giving him certain sacrifices which an Ifa priest may prescribe. These sometimes include chickens, goats and sheep.

Another prominent myth[5] among the Yoruba says that at the time of creation, Death had no real function because people did not have to die at that time. There was a link between heaven and earth.[6] When a person became old, he might go to heaven to reside permanently. Even the young and the middle-aged usually paid regular visits to heaven with the use of a rope which they climbed. The rope was cut by God because of the excesses of man.[7] God then introduced Death into the world as a means of ensuring that the old, particularly returned to heaven as ancestors[8]. Death was thus originally meant for the old alone. But in an Ifa verse recited for me by Chief 'Tunji Adeyẹfa[9], the old people held a meeting with Death and implored him to play a fair game with them by killing not only the old but also the young. Death accepted their recommendation and as from that time, Death kills both the old and the young.[10] The full *Ifa* verse known as *Ọ̀yẹ̀kú Pàlàbà* is as follows:

Translation[11] from *Oyeku Palaba.*

At the time of creation,
People do not just die anyhow,
It was only the old who are killed by Death.
The "*Ọ̀yẹ̀kú*-kill-the-old-and-not-the-young"[12],
Lived in Ile-Ifẹ at that time.

They complained that young people
Become prosperous and achieve a lot[13],
Whereas the old might not have achieved much.
They proposed that as Death kills the old
He should kill the young too.
The people of Ile-Ife therefore held a meeting
And invited Death for consultation.
Death arrived.
They proposed that he should not kill
On the basis of old age again,
That if he kills the old
And takes away the breath of the young
There is no prohibition.
There was a general agreement on this.
Death then promised that
If he kills the old
He will also kill the young.
This accounts for the abundance of deaths.
Whenever Death kills the young
Death is blamed
But when he kills the old
People say that Death has done well.

It is believed that the agreement reached between the people of Ile-Ifè and Death has led to the indiscriminate killing of both the young and the old by Death in Yorubaland.

Belief in the Premonition of Death:

The Yoruba also believe that in most cases, Death does not kill its victim without warning. There is thus the belief in the premonition of death. Shortly before a person's death, a dog may be howling incessantly at the back of his house; or he may be seeing the apparitions of his deceased relatives. These are the usual signs of an impending death among the Yoruba.[14] There is a similar belief in Alto Minho, (Portugal), documented in Joao De Pina-Cabral (1986:217).

Dreams among the Yoruba, is also a means of knowing about an imminent death. The person might dream of his own death, or may dream about his or her marriage. In the usual interpretation of dreams among the Yoruba, dreams of marriage are warnings of death. (Parrinder 1976:61). A close relative may also have that dream. Similarly in Potamia, rural Greece (Danforth 1982:15), an impending death can be revealed through dreams, especially dreams of weddings. Chief M.A.Fabunmi, the late traditional historian of the

Ife, once told me about a dream which he dreamt some years ago.[15] In the dream, he saw his late friend Pa. Atitebi being lowered into the grave. But to his surprise, a message was sent to him to inform him of his friend's death very early the next day. Dreams that also signify death include those in which an *egúngún*, (ancestral masquerader), coffins, and black dresses are seen. A person who has been ill for a long time might have a tingling feeling that the day of death is near. In such cases, the Yoruba say that his body "has informed him about it". The Yoruba believe that this is one of the ways through which one knows of the approach of death.

The Yoruba believe that people usually have premonitions of death through a stint of divination at the home of the Ifa priest. In most cases, death might be appeased with an appropriate sacrifice. (Abimbola 1976:160-162). Other forms of divination may also be used for this purpose.

It is also widely believed that prophets and prophetesses in the African Independent Churches, especially those endowed with "the third eye" and who have the ability to prophesy and foretell the future may in fact disclose the news of an imminent death to a person. (Ọmọyajowo 1982:127).

Belief in Reincarnation and the ancestors.

The Yoruba lineage comprises the ancestors, the living, and the unborn children. It thus has "a cyclical and endless character" (Bascom 1969a:115). The soul of an ancestor may be reborn endlessly by his offspring (Idowu 1962:194; Parrinder 1972:52-3). It is this belief in reincarnation which accounts for the Yoruba idea which states that if the wives of the lineage are faithful, all the members of the lineage are always composed of one stock.

The ancestors are known as "*òkú ọ̀run*", that is, "the dead in heaven" (Abimbola 1976:152). Abimbọla classifies them among the group of the "good supernatural powers" who help man and are usually given sacrifices. Death is thus held to be a transitory stage between the earthly world of physical existence and the spiritual world of the ancestors. The ancestors are therefore believed to be alive in the afterlife as members of the lineage. Hence they have been referred to as "the living dead" (Mbiti 1975:110). The home of the ancestors is heaven, (*ọ̀run*), although they are also believed to be available in the world at the same time (McClelland 1982:33). That is why the Yoruba usually gives a small part of his meal to the ancestors while eating. This is called "*yíyán ilẹ̀*" which means "putting a little bit of food on the ground". Libation of palm wine, beer or any

other drink may also be poured on the ground for them[16] (Mitchell 1977:6). The ancestors, because they are believed to be around, can see their offspring; reward them for good deeds and punish them for bad deeds. (Abimbọla 1973b:75; Idowu 1962:192). This belief encourages the living to live a virtuous life. (Beier 1954:329).

A man normally venerates and approaches the ancestors of his patrilineage for help as they are his own direct ancestors. (Schwab 1955:372). For example, during the usual monthly meetings of the members of the lineage in the Central Hall of the Compound[17] (*Àkòdì*), the ancestors are collectively venerated by placing some food and meat on the stumps which represent the ancestors of the lineage. Libations are also poured on the floor. Apart from this communal offering to the ancestors, regular individual offerings are usually presented to them, in the form of feasts and parties held in their honour. All these are done so that they can influence in a positive way, the events taking place in the lives of their offsprings (Schwab 1955:358).

Libations may also be poured at their graves; kola nut (*cola acuminata*) may be split and thrown on their graves and a goat may be slaughtered every year in honour of a particular ancestor. The animal is brought to the front or

the back of the house where prayers are said on it as follows: "My father, I offer this goat to you, I actually want to slaughter it in your memory. Do not sleep forgetfully (that is, do not forget us). Always protect us, always help us. Please do not let the enemies overcome us. Let us become wealthy and help us to have lots of children. Do not let us become ill. Let me be capable of giving you another goat next year."

The goat will then be slaughtered. The right leg will be put on the blood if the goat is being offered to the father and left leg is used if offered to the mother. The belief is that if such offerings are given to the ancestors they will render the necessary help to the offspring. (Abimbọla 1976:151).

To make such offering efficacious and acceptable to either an ancestor or one's "head", the supplicant must invite relatives, neighbours and friends to share the food and drinks with his family. If the food is consumed by his family alone, then the sacrifice will not accepted by that particular ancestor. An *Ifa* verse from the *Odù* known as *Ìwòrì-Ọ̀wọ́nrín* relates the story of three friends named Akíntán, Asògbà and Asòní who were citizens of *Ifẹ̀ Òòyèlagbò* (ancient Ifẹ̀). They consulted two *Ifa* priests and made enquiries about what they could do to become prosperous in

life. They were each instructed to sacrifice a goat to their "heads", (also known as their predestined lots). The first two bought goats and palm-wine; slaughtered, cooked and ate the food with the members of their immediate families. Their sacrifices were not accepted and they consequently remained poor. But the third man, Asòní invited relatives, friends, and neighbours to his feast. The guests ate, drank and prayed for him wishing him long life, God's blessings and protection. His sacrifice was accepted. He thus became wealthy. If, on the other hand, the ancestors are neglected, the consequences can be disastrous. Two examples from the Ifa corpus will be given to illustrate the two sides of the argument.[18]

The first Ifa verse is from the *Odù* known as *Ìkadìí*. It is the story of a woman, Omolú, who was unfaithful to her husband. Some people who knew about her exploits reported her to her husband who was the king of the town. She overcame her subsequent troubles through the sacrifice which she offered to her late mother and her own dream. The visions she saw in her dream made her become victorious over her enemies. In her dream, she consulted some Ifa priests who divined for her and informed her that a conspiracy was being organized against her. They directed her to offer a big cock as a sacrifice to her dead mother. The owners of

birds, *ẹlẹyẹ* (witches) promised to help her after she offered the sacrifice.

Two days later, she paid a visit to her lover in another village. She received a lot of gifts there. Those who did not like Omolú discovered her game and informed her husband, who was filled with anger. He therefore waited for her at the entrance of the town. He also enlisted the support of other men and women in watching and catching her. Omolú's dead mother saw that a lot of people were making preparation to kill her daughter: the king has asked some men to dig a grave while some others were requested to sharpen matchets. The deceased therefore sang a certain song to her daughter's hearing, warning her of the danger ahead and asking her to pick up a grinding stone at the side of the footpath. She also taught her an adequate alibi which she should give to her husband. The alibi: that she went to the other village to look for a good grinding stone which she would be using for grinding *osùn* powder (*Bixa Orellana)* used for rubbing the bodies of her children. Her husband accepted this alibi. She was thus saved from death while her enemies were put to shame.

The second Ifa verse which shows the consequences which the neglect of the ancestors can bring is recorded in Abimbọla (1976:157). It is from the *Odù* known as *Òtúúrúpọ̀n*

Méjì. It is the story of a man named Oyeepolú whose life became miserable. He could not find a wife and lived in poverty. He sacrificed to his dead parents at their graves and thus overcame his troubles. There are other reasons why the ancestors may be angry with man. These may include the nonchalant attitude of a rich person towards his needy brothers and sisters; the use of bad medicines to harm one's brother or sister; and the escalation of an unnecessary dispute between children of the same father. Finally, if a brother is rich and successful, his brothers and sisters may, out of jealousy and envy, visit their father's grave to relate to the dead person a catalogue of accusations against the rich brother and consequently invoke their father to punish the rich brother. It is generally believed that the father may heed their call. The rich brother can only be helped out of the situation if he contacts an *Ifa* priest or an *Aladura* prophet before the father starts on a vengeance course. Appropriate sacrifices or courses of prayer and fasting may then be performed by the rich brother to avert the anger of the father.

It is not only through animal sacrifice that a person can give an offering to his ancestors. The Yoruba generally believe that the right half of the body represents the father while the left half of the body represents the

mother. In practice, the right foot is referred to as belonging to the father while the left foot is said to belong to the mother (Daramọla & Jeje 1967:179).[19] To venerate one's mother for example among the Yoruba, a lobe of kolanut (*Cola Acuminata*) is split and a prayer similar to that said on the animal sacrificed above is said on it. The lobes of kolanuts are then used to massage the left toe. Two pieces are thrown outside while the remaining two pieces may be eaten by the supplicant. It is believed that the prayers will be answered as the deceased is believed to have received the offering thrown outside the house. Palm-wine may also be spilled on the left toe. In this way communication is maintained with the female ancestor.

The ancestors are believed not only to hover around the house and the neighbourhood but also around the grave where they can be contacted. When a person thus speaks with his deceased father there, it is believed that the dead would answer or give a response to the person's demands. Hence a Yoruba man would say "I spoke with my father and he responded". We should note that the Yoruba would in speaking not add the word "late" when speaking about his deceased parent because the dead are believed to be in existence as members of the lineage, even if in a spirit form. Though the dead responds to the demands of the living, it does not do

so physically with a human voice. An informant of mine, Mr. Arawande spoke of the state of the ancestors when he said[20]: "The living tree does not speak with the dry, dead tree". The living tree signifies the living (humans) while the dry, dead tree signifies the dead (ancestors). Puzzled by this statement, I asked him to give some more explanation. He stated that just a thin wedge of thread separates the living from the dead[21]. As a result, there is no distance in the sphere of existence of the dead and that of the living. This explains the ability of the dead in seeing the current happenings in his family. But the fact remains that the dead cannot speak or reply in human voice because of this wedge. The open lines of communication from the dead to the living remains the medium of Ifa and other forms of divination, dreams, prophecies, and visions in the African Independent Churches and the revelations of Yoruba medicinemen. (Idowu 1962:191-192). To shed more light on our discussion I will relate below the background to my discussion with this informant.

Mr. Arawande bought an eight-acre cocoa farm at a village near Ọrẹ along the Ondo to Benin City expressway. It was an already developed farm; the cocoa trees had been having pods at that time. He therefore had high hopes of making a great deal of money at the time of harvest. Just

about this time, there was a series of quarrels, misunderstanding and fights between new settlers and their landlords who sold farmlands to them. A few of the farm settlers were even reported to have been killed with matchets on their new farms. Mr. Arawande left Ile-Ifẹ for his farm on a Thursday morning and arrived on the main road to the farm in the evening. There he was challenged by two matchet-wielding men who asked him if he was a new settler in the area. He, sensing danger, denied being one; adding that he was in the area to visit a friend. The two men then informed him that they were actually looking for new settlers with a view to inflicting harm on them because the new farmers had dispossessed the community of their farms. Mr. Arawande immediately left for his house in Ile-Ifẹ, where he later heard reports of the killing of two new settlers.

Early the next morning he went, with a keg of palm-wine and two kolanuts (*Cola Acuminata*) to his father's grave at St. Phillip's Anglican Cathedral cemetery. He prostrated beside his father's grave and thanked his father profusely for his protection over him, most especially for having saved him from sudden death. He poured the bottle of wine on the grave and also left the kolanuts there. When he came back, he informed my field assistant (who is his brother)

and myself[22] that he spoke with his father and received a reply.

We now come to the question - Who becomes an ancestor? The Yoruba believe that it is only the good who become ancestors after death, the bad do not.[23] The young also do not qualify on the account that their lifespan has not been completed.[24] (Abimbola 1973b:76; McClelland 1982:33 & Ajuwọn 1982: 1-2). Those who die from "bad" diseases, such as leprosy may also not become ancestors.

Another Yoruba belief which is connected with the dead is the belief in reincarnation. This is referred to as "*àṣẹ̀hìnwáyé*" which means "the return to life of the departed". (Idowu 1962:194; Daramola & Jeje 1967:182-5). The souls of the good ancestors are believed to be reborn in their offsprings. When this happens, it is referred to as "*yíyà*" which means "to become a new baby or being". (Johnson 1899:51; Ogunbowale 1966:51f; Lawal 1977:51; Mitchell 1977:50). It is believed that the father or the mother is always re-born by his children. Such children are named "*Babatunde*", if a boy and "*Iyabọ*","*Yetunde*" or "*Yejide*" if a girl. (Bascom 1960:404; Awolalu 1980:33 & Idowu 1962:195).

It is possible to identify the particular ancestor which has been reborn into a family by consulting an Ifa priest. This process is called "*ẹsẹ̀ntayé*" which means

"knowing the footsteps which the child brought into the world".[25] (Idowu 1962:181). The name of the particular ancestor will be revealed, together with the revelations about the future of the baby and its religious observances and food prohibitions. (Idowu 1962:181). It is this belief and practice which assures the old that death does not end it all and ensures that they will always be members of their respective lineages until eternity. (Morton-Williams 1960a:36; Beier 1954:329; Bascom 1969a:73 & 115). In this way, a person is believed to be reborn for six lifespans which if added to his first existence makes up to seven circles of birth.

Some people cannot be reborn in the manner described above; *e.g.*, if he has been excommunicated and disowned as a member of the lineage on the account of a serious offence. The remarks of Schwab (1955:365) on the consequences of such punishment is appropriate here:

"...It means the loss of rights in ancestor communion, in the protection of the ancestors on earth and in the ancestral world, and the loss of the rights to reincarnation".

In practice, efforts may be made to rehabilitate the offender.

The Belief in the After-Life:

Death is seen as a means of recalling home the aged.[26] (Idowu 1962:189; Mbiti 1975:110). When a person dies, he leaves this world for a new abode referred to as *ọ̀run aláìkeji* which can be translated as "heaven" or "heaven of *Aláìkeji*". (Abraham 1958:527). The Yoruba also refer to this sphere of existence as *ehin-iwa*, which can be translated as "the aftermath of one's character (here on Earth)".[27] One's character here specifically refer to the person , his physical and spiritual attributes here on earth. This name could have arisen because of the importance which the Yoruba attach to the character of each individual.

Hence a person of good character is called *ọmọlúwàbí*,[28] that is "one whose behaviour shows that he was born in a good home". On the other hand, a person of bad character is regarded as an evil person.[29] The connection between a person's character and the after-life is that the latter is believed to be a place where a person is rewarded or punished according to his character or actions in the world. (Awolalu 1970:35).

The after-life is also known as *mọ́ọ̀simi ìfẹ̀hìntì ayọ̀*, which literally means "a joyful place of rest where one sits in a reclining position".[30] In this connection, we should note that the reclined position is perceived by the Yoruba

to be the most suitable sitting position for old people. Hence the Yoruba saying "sitting in a reclined position is the best and befitting way for the old". The meaning of this is that the after-life is a place reserved exclusively for the old, although it is thought that the young visit there but do not reside there permanently.

Shortly after death, the dead's first place of visit is the smithys'. The dead visits the smithys' "out of gratitude" - to express his thanks to Ogun, the god of iron, for the implements (hoes, spades and diggers) which were used in digging his grave. (Crowther 1844, in McKenzie 1976a:100). Also, it is reputed to be the place where various items are made, cast and moulded with iron and other metals. Iron or brass being moulded into a pot can actually be a parallel of human beings being moulded by the arch-divinity (*Orisanla*).

Besides, the dead is believed to cast away his human body at the smithy and take on a spiritual form. His new form thereafter consists of a spiritual body which is not inhibited by the artificial boundaries such as locked doors, windows, walls and distances. (Awolalu 1970:27). This explains the belief of the Yoruba which says that the dead can get into locked rooms in such spiritual bodies and actually travel at a speed faster than the speed of sound.

Travelling from one town to another is thus believed to be accomplished in a matter of moments. Once the dead has taken on this new form, he proceeds on a visit to his last place of work. For example, a farmer who dies in the town is believed to leave immediately for his farm which may be several kilometres away. He goes round his farm, assesses the state of the farm and leaves, taking away with him the essence of the crops. This explains the reason why crops on inherited farms are expected to have a significantly reduced yield and a short lifespan.

We will now look at the belief of the Yoruba about the fate of the dead in the ground after death.

The Fate of the Dead:

A classic example of the belief of the Yoruba about the fate of the dead is from a verse in the *odù* of *Ifá* known as *Òtúrá Ará Ìwàrà,* recited for me by Chief 'Tunji Adeyẹfa. A summary of the verse is as follows. There was a woman named *Elúfọlà* who was ripe for marriage. In those days, a lady consults the *Ifa* priest for divination before getting married. The *Ifa* priests assured Elúfọlà that her intended marital home would be comfortable for her. She offered the prescribed sacrifice. Her husband was also warned to refrain from maltreating her. Awàrà promised not to maltreat her.

The marriage ceremony was celebrated. After Elúfọlà had had five children for her husband, Awàrà, he met a smart, fashionable lady named Oge. Awàrà got married to her. Oge's demand was that Awàrà should not sleep with Elúfọlà, the senior wife or have anything to do with her again. The husband gave her his promise. In fact, the new wife Oge and the husband Awàrà refused to speak with Elúfọlà and her children. The house was thus divided into two. Elúfọlà was also prevented from harvesting any crop and collecting any fruit from Awàrà's farm. Elúfọlà therefore resorted to doing odd-jobs in order to feed herself and her children. But Awàrà and Oge were still in love, but Oge had no children for her husband. A few years after that, Awàrà fell ill and died. The children of Elúfọlà who were all grown-ups contributed burial shrouds and prepared food for the funeral of their father. Oge was the one struck by the tragedy. She wept bitterly and could not be comforted. Elúfọlà did not weep or mourn the death of her husband. The members of the *ìsọ̀gán* dug the grave. Shortly before the burial on the second day, Awàrà came back to life again and demanded to see Elúfọlà, his first wife. Awàrà informed all those present that while he was in the ground (his soul had descended into the ground immediately after death) the people of the ground asked him for the reason why his first

wife, Elúfọlà refused to shed any tears on hearing of the news of his death. The people of the ground came to the conclusion that he had probably offended her deeply. They therefore decided to beat him continuously from then until Elúfọlà becomes old, dies, and joins him in the ground. Both of them would then be interrogated and if Elufọla is found guilty, then she would also be beaten. Awàrà then asked Elúfọlà to mourn him and weep for his death. She refused to do so, saying that Oge who enjoyed the support of the husband should weep for him; as long as her children are taking part in the funeral celebration, that should be regarded as her own contribution. All the relatives and sympathizers present begged Elúfọlà to change her mind and mourn her husband. In the end, she promised to do so, if Awara could buy for her, all the presents which he gave to Oge. Two dresses were bought for her immediately. Elúfọlà forgave her husband and wept, mourning for her husband. She thereafter hailed her husband as follows:

"You may now proceed, good husband
On another day[31]
I will get married to you again.
When you get home
Greet them at home.
When you get to the road,

Greet those you find there.
Do not turn into an animal
Greet your father and mother
And those who have had the
Title of Awàrà before you."

Awàrà then stopped breathing and died, having come back to life for some hours. He was buried and his soul returned to the ground. The people of the ground welcomed him warmly and did not beat him again. It is because of this journey into the ground and the fact that the dead is actually buried in the ground that the Yoruba refer to the dead as "a part of the people of the ground", *ẹni ilẹ̀*. (Abimbọla 1973a:61). It is to be noted that *ilẹ̀* (the earth) is a Yoruba divinity who is highly revered. Robin Horton describes it as "the spiritual force of the earth upon which the community is settled". (in, Fortes 1983:60). He adds that the earth "rewards harmonious living with general prosperity and inflicts punishment, either directly or indirectly through its human agents (typically members of the *Ògbóni* society) upon those who threaten to disrupt communal harmony". Thus if the earth is offended and not appeased, she may consume a person and capture him in its bowels, (that is, have the person interred in it). To prevent this, the Yoruba pray to it for protection as

follows: "Earth, known as *Ogere,* you who adorn your hair with hoes, the owner of the bag of wickedness, let me walk over you for a very long time, please do not swallow me now".[32] The implication of this will be discussed below.

From the above excerpt on Awàrà and Elúfọlà, we can make the following inferences and generalizations: Firstly, that breaking of promises and similar misdemeanours in the world can have serious consequences in the ground at the time of the interrogation of the dead by the people of the ground. When a person breaks a solemn promise, people say that he has "betrayed the earth". (Idowu 1962:88). Such an offence is usually awarded a punishment directly by the earth goddess. This explains the severity of Awara's punishment in the earth. It may even be said that it was the promise which Awàrà broke that made the earth "swallow" him at the time it did.

Secondly, that as soon as a person dies, he visits the smithy's, his work-place, and any other place he likes before finally descending into the ground as a soul where the process of interrogation takes place. Johnson calls this interrogation "*ríro ẹjọ́*" which means "stating one's view of the case". (1899:51). We need to add however that it is not just a matter of stating one's side of a case but that it is believed to be a series of questioning sessions in which the

dead is questioned by the people of the ground about his activities on earth. This signifies the begining of the judgement process which terminates in heaven. It is because of these activities which go on in the ground that some people hold the belief that the home of the dead is in the earth. (Awolalu 1980:31).

Thirdly, we see that a woman must lament and mourn her partner's death. Failure to do this might lead to the soul being sent back into the yet-to-be-buried body so that the person can make amends and iron out his differences with members of his family in the world. Hence, Awàrà's soul was sent back into his body so that he could make amends with his wife, Elúfọlà.

Fourthly, we see the belief of the Yoruba that the earth is inhabited by some spiritual beings created by God and that they are charged with the task of interrogating the dead. Moreover, we see the first wife Elúfọlà making a promise to marry the same man again in another lifetime, either in the afterlife or after they might have been reborn in another lifetime. This shows the belief of the Yoruba in reincarnation and marriage in the afterlife.

Elúfọlà asked her husband not to turn into an animal. This throws light on the belief of the Yoruba on punishment after death. It is believed that a wicked person might be

changed to a shrub, a tree or an animal after judgement in heaven. Elúfọlà also asked Awàrà to greet his parents. This shows the belief of the Yoruba that the dead meet with the members of their family and other relatives in heaven.

Finally, we see the belief of the Yoruba about heaven and the world. Heaven is regarded as home, hence Elufola in her address to Awàrà said: "..when you get home, greet them at home". The Yoruba regard the world as a temporary place of residence for man, or as a market since the market is a place one visits for a short time. This explains the meaning of the Yoruba saying: "The world is a market-place, heaven is home".(Awolalu 1970:37; Araba 1975:1).[33]

The records of the good and bad deeds of every individual are kept by *Olodumare* (*Àjàlọ́run*) in the heaven of *Àjàlọ́run*/God. They are given to the committee of judges mentioned earlier at the appearance of the individual in the heaven of the ladder. The contents of the records are thrown open for a general discussion between the judges. The dead is asked a series of questions on his activities in the world; especially about the bad ones they find in the records. For example, the deaths of other people caused by him; and if he was a burglar, the number of burglaries he had participated in; the size and worth of properties involved; and the number of casualties in the raids. He then

has to state his case, with much weeping and great lamentation. Thus, the Yoruba say "there are court cases in heaven, held amidst much weeping".[34] It is believed that the dead would be judged as righteous or condemned according to their actions on earth. (Lucas 1948:223). The implication of this is that anyone who is publicly ackowledged as bad by humans in the world would definitely be condemned in heaven at judgement. Hence the Yoruba say "there is no real judgement in heaven, the most important judgement takes place in the world",[35] (emphasis mine). The meaning of this statement is that the quality of judgement and the notion of rights and wrongs are the same in heaven and on earth.

The punishment inflicted on the dead is believed to be broken into three main categories. First, the severe punishment in the ground at interrogation is the first part of the series of punishment. Secondly, another set of punishment is inflicted on the dead in heaven. We shall return to that soon. Thirdly, a set of retributive punishments are inflicted at this time, not directly on the deceased but on his children, his grandchildren and his great grandchildren after him.

The dead is believed to be received by his children who have died before him. For the dead who have offspring in heaven, he is spared all the troubles of finding a place to

live or of building a house there. His children would have built a house there for him. The dead who have no children in heaven thus have an initial accommodation problem. There is a contradiction here in the belief of the Yoruba about the abode of the dead who die at a tender age. Traditionally, the people believe that the young do not go to heaven because their lifespan has not been completed on earth. At the same time, there is this parallel belief that the children prepare for the arrival of their parents in heaven. When questioned further, my informants stated that the young do not live permanently in heaven but travel there to make adequate preparation for the arrival of their parents in heaven and to run errands for their parents there. The dead who has no child there (that is, who lost no child on earth through death) has no one to help him. Such a helpless parent may, as the belief goes, come back to the world to take away one or two of his children if he has many. Such a child falls sick and dies soon after his father's funeral. The deceased does this by taking away the child's soul. This accounts for the Yoruba practice of protecting the child with the use of traditional medicine when the father dies.[36] The medicine is meant primarily to prevent the father from taking the child away. Secondly, it is also done to prevent the child from seeing the ghost of

the deceased since it is believed that children, dogs, cats and men who wash their faces with medicines are those who have the "third eye" and can consequently see the ghost of the dead when he visits his home.[37] That explains the reason why people are highly worried when a dog howls incessantly in the neighbourhood.

The dead are believed to get married to their former spouses in heaven. In the case of couples who had been separated on earth, the wife is thought to be compelled to marry her first husband in heaven. Those who have never been married on earth before their death remain single in heaven. Those who get married to their spouses in heaven do not produce any new children. The dead in heaven are also believed to engage in their former earthly professions. For example, a farmer sets up another farm while a trader continues to trade. It is this belief in the continuity of the dead's worldly profession in heaven which forms the basis of the popular Yoruba belief which states that the dead takes away to heaven all his worldly possessions. Although these possessions like farmlands, dresses, beds, and clothes may still be seen physically and even be inherited by the offspring, the original essence of those materials have gone with the dead and are being used by the dead in heaven. The Yoruba say that the proof of this is

that in dreams, the dead is not seen in the naked form and is not also seen in the shroud with which he was buried. The dead is always seen in one of his dresses which he had when he was alive. Such dresses when inherited by his children quickly become old because they are being worn in heaven. In a similar way, a son who inherits a cocoa farm has to do a lot of replanting as the trees are believed to be yielding fruits for the dead in heaven; the trees in the world would not yield enough fruits again and might even die.

The dead are also believed to come to the markets in the world regularly to buy farm produce and even do some harvesting. When the rice goes bad in the store in the market, it is believed that the essence of such rice has been bought by the dead. All the sacrificial items like goats, fowls, and palm-wine offered to them in the world all get to heaven where the dead accept them and hold feasts with them. The dead therefore eat, drink and feel happy. Abundant blessings are given to such children by the dead. But when food is not sent regularly to the dead in this way, the dead become hungry and thirsty. They therefore become angry with their children.

The Idea of Judgement and Punishment:

Those who have not conducted themselves properly while on earth will be judged as having been at fault, or in the wrong. There is a standard form of behaviour expected from a Yoruba person. Any deviation from this is seriously frowned at and considered as being bad. Examples of these are numerous and include arrogance, malice, selfishness, theft, burglary, rape, murder and so on and so forth. (Bascom 1969a:115; 1969b:75). People with those traits are believed to be qualified in all respects for punishment after their death. On the other hand, those whose characters have been assessed as good while on earth are said to be in the right. Examples of good behaviour include kindness, humility, loving others, helping members of the extended family and the kin group, helping friends, taking adequate care of his immediate family and refraining from participating in anti-social behaviour that might tarnish the good image of the family. If the consensus of opinion in the locality about such person is that he is a good man, he is consequently believed to be judged righteous in heaven. This favourable judgement therefore goes with the privileges of becoming an ancestor, living in the afterlife, and being reincarnated in an offspring. When such person is reincarnated, the *oríkì* (praise-name or cognomen) of the ancestor is given to the

child. An annual feast is held in the name of the baby though the motive is to celebrate it for the deceased. Besides, a good person in an earlier lifetime will usually have his next life greatly improved. For example, he may become a very wealthy person or a king in the next lifetime. It is because of the possibility of this improvement that the Yoruba say that "the honourable house/line does not become extinct".

William R. Bascom, writing about the fate of good people and their eventual destination notes that:

"..The good people reach the good heaven (*ọ̀run rere*) also called the heaven of contentment, or the heaven of breezes (*ọ̀run afẹ́fẹ́*). Here the air is fresh, and everything is good, the wrongs of the earth are righted, the multiple souls are reunited, and life is much as it is on earth".[38] (1969a:115).

There is general agreement in Yorubaland about the fate of the good people as the remarks of Bascom also shows.[39] But the multiple souls are not all believed to be reunited in heaven. This is discussed elsewhere in this study.

When a person dies, even before the dead leaves the world, *Àjàlọ́run* (God) immediately sends the reports of his deeds from his residence in the higher heaven (the heaven of *Àjàlọ́run*/the heaven of God) to the judges in the heaven of

the ladder. The reports are read by the judges. On arrival there, the dead reveals to the judges the results of his interrogation in the ground. He is further questioned about his life as reflected especially in his records. This questioning may last several days, weeks, or months. At the end of it all the dead is sentenced. Appeals are heard by God. But if God upholds the verdict of the judges, the line of appeal for the dead has ended. Hence the Yoruba say that "there is no appeal for the case which God has judged".[40]

There is a wide range of punishment. The sentence may be light or severe according to the magnitude of the offences committed. The first type of punishment is that which is meted out to the dead himself. The dead may be turned into trees in another lifetime and eventually end up in peoples' homes as firewood; others are changed into goats and are eventually slaughtered by humans in the world; and the soul of another may be reincarnated in a fowl. (Lucas 1948:254). Someone found guilty of sorcery might be born again as an *akíríboto*[41] as a commensurate punishment for his or her offence.

The second type of punishment is that of retribution. James Johnson (1899:51) describes this as "retributive providence", which he defines as "fear of social disgrace and punishment, which will fall upon an individual and evil

wrongdoer and his relatives and other connections also". A sorcerer who dies for example, may be punished in heaven by having his soul placed in a dog in another lifetime. But the greatest punishment will be suffered by his offsprings in life, for about three successive generations. His children may always meet with disasters, sufferings, and troubles in all their ways and through no faults of their own. Their problems can eventually be traced to the "bad seeds" which their parent "planted" in the world. As the Yoruba say, the children are reaping the fruits of their ancestor's crop. For these types of troubles suffered by offsprings, there is usually no solution because the retributive judgement has to run its course as laid down by God. The judgement of retribution starts before the death of the condemned person and continues for several years after the person's death. Max Weber (1967:275) has described this type of belief as a way of explaining suffering and injustice in the world.[42]

My informants[43] gave the example of a woman who was the second wife of her husband. The husband later married three more wives. This second wife was the favourite wife who had the goodwill of the husband. The husband took very good care of her to the detriment of the other wives who were even punished on her recommendations and advice to the husband. She therefore made their lives very miserable.

When the daughter of this favourite wife got married, she became the second wife of a young man. In her husband's house, she met with various difficulties and frustrations. The first wife, the husband, her brother-in-laws and sister-in-laws conspired against her. After some years, she was sent packing by the husband who had become wealthy at that time. Her problems were said to be a direct result of the actions of her mother against the other wives of her father. It is a sort of retributive punishment meted out to her as part of her mother's punishment for her bad deeds.

The second example is that of a farmer who died and was survived by a wife and four children. The farmer's younger brother inherited the deceased's farms but refused to have anything to do with the deceased's wife and children. He therefore did not take care of them. The deceased's brother was consequently besieged with so many problems and disasters. *Ifa* divination revealed that he had offended the dead, and that those problems were the begining of a series of disasters which he had to go through. His children too, encountered so many difficulties which were all traced to the bad deeds of their father. My informants informed me that the retributive judgement is still running its course in that family line in the third generation.

The young (*ọ̀dọ́*) do not go to heaven. The belief is that a young person leaves the place of his/her death for another town where he would remain and physically live until his/her appointed day of death arrives. A detailed discussion of this would be undertaken later on in this chapter.

The Yoruba Idea of Life:

For the Yoruba, there is the recognition that the life of a person is sustained as long as breath remains in him. This breath is known as *ẹ̀mí*. (Lucas 1948:246 & 248). Thus the Yoruba say that "there is hope of an improved lifestyle as long as the breath remains in man". (Abimbola 1973b:78-79). It is also in this respect that they also have the saying which is: "the breath is the most important element". The Yoruba therefore recognize that the cessation of breath in man leads to death. When a person dies, he is said to have "been out of his place", or simply "he is dead", that is in Yoruba language, *ó kú*. The breath is thus seen as the basis of life.

For the Yoruba, there are three basic periods in the life of a person and they are the morning period, the afternoon period and the evening period. The morning period (*ìgbà àárọ̀*) normally starts at birth and ends at about the age of thirty-nine. This is accepted as the period when an

individual struggles to learn a trade, enter into a profession or attain a certain level of education. It is also the period when a person gets married and starts a family of his own. This period is also known as the period of youth.

The afternoon period (*igba osan*) starts from the age of about forty and ends at about sixty. It is the time when a man or woman is still strong to work; puts the children into the different professions; marries off his daughters and finances the marriages of his sons. The person also builds a house during this period. The latter part (fifty to sixty) signifies the onset of grey hairs in both men and women and the period of menopause in women.

Finally, the evening period starts from the age of about sixty-one and terminates at death. This is the period when old age actually starts, with the dominance of grey hair on the head. It is the actual period of rest, when the level of work being done is reduced. Parents expect their children to support them materially at this time. Indeed this can be described as the most important period for the Yoruba and this is manifested in their saying which is as follows:

"There are three periods for a person on earth,
The period of morning, afternoon and evening,
May the evening be a better period of time for us

Than the morning".[44]

In the above saying, prayers are said by individuals, wishing that the period of evening should be a better time for them than the morning. There are certain things which make the period of evening a better one and they are what Akiwọwọ (1983:14) has described as "five categories of inalienable social values which constitute the purpose and goal of human collectivities" and they are "*ire àìkú* (the value of good health till old age); *ire owo* (financial security); *ire ọkọ - aya* (the value of intimate companionship and love); *ire ọmọ* (the value of parenthood); *ire ìborí ọ̀tá* (the value of assured self actualization)".[45] Akiwọwọ has referred to these five values as "*ire gbogbo*, the good of all".[46]

As the time of evening is the period when a person cannot do much work, those five things are for him a necessity. By living in good health, he would not have to pay exhorbitant medical bills; by having financial security, he would not starve in his old age; by having a partner, he would not be lonely in old age; by having children, he would be properly taken care of in his old age; and by having assured self actualization, he would not be harmed by sorcery or witchcraft. When all or most of these conditions

are met, the evening period of the person concerned is described as having been better than the morning.

Old age comes to man in the period of evening. The importance of old age cannot be over-emphasised. As the old is seen as a repository of wisdom and experience, due respect is accorded to them. But the greatest fear the Yoruba have is that of suffering at the time of old age, a situation that could easily be brought about by the absence of one or more of the above stated values. When all or most of these values are realized by a person in his or her old age, people refer to him or her after death as having lived a good life.

The Yoruba Concepts of the Person and the Belief in Souls and Ghosts:

The Yoruba conceive of the person as having physical and spiritual attributes. The physical elements of man include the parts of the body while the spiritual attributes include the souls and breath. A person dies when the breath stops.

Orí (head) is also one of the spiritual attributes of man. It is also known as *kádàrá* (destiny), *ìpín* (predestined share), *àyànmọ́* (alloted share), *ẹlẹ́dàá* (the creator), *àkúnlẹ̀yàn* (the lot chosen while kneeling down) and *ìpọ̀nrí* (the inner head). This has also been described by

Bascom (1960:408) as the ancestral guardian soul.[47] This soul resides in the head (*orí*). The head is thus seen as a symbol of this soul. The belief of the Yoruba is that the choice of an individual's *orí* was made in heaven prior to birth.[48] Predestination which is always associated with the inner physical head is seen as the symbol of free choice received by each person in heaven. It is this choice which determines the fate of everybody on earth. (Abimbola 1973b:80 & 87; 1976:113).[49]

An example given by Abimbola as reflection of predestined choice in heaven include the death of a young person[50]. The greater part of what happens to one on earth can be attributed to predestination, though human effort can also be a contributing factor. *Orí* is regarded as a personal divinity who is worshipped and propitiated. As *Ọ̀rúnmìlà* (*Ifa*) is believed to be present when each individual chose his destiny, he is also believed to be capable of revealing the destinies of everybody in the world through the process of divination.

Apart from this ancestral guardian soul, another important element associated with man by the Yoruba is the shadow (*òjìji*). The shadow has no real function. It follows the person about as long as the person is alive. (Parrinder 1976:135). The *orí*, the ancestral guardian soul (represented

by the head) is believed to be resident in the head, and has two parts: *iwájú/àwùjẹ* (the front of the head) and *ìpàkọ́* (back of the head/occiput). (Bascom 1960:405-6; 1969b:73).

According to popular belief, each individual has three ancestral guardian souls. The first one actually resides in the head, the second resides in the world in the form of a person who goes about, while the third resides in the afterlife. The one which resides in the head departs from the body at death. This, together with the breath report in the afterlife for judgement. While on earth, the front of the head works with the feet in helping the individual to reach a decision, and the back of the head helps the person in evading troubles.[51] When the first ancestral guardian soul receives judgement in heaven, it is sent back to earth either to be reincarnated in an offspring or to be turned into an animal or tree.

The second ancestral guardian soul resides in the world, and it is believed that it actually has a physical body which is an exact image of the person. This walks about on earth and do identical things like the person. The person must not meet this soul in its physical form while on earth. It is called *ẹnìkejì*, the second person. An *Ifa* diviner at Ibadan, Odùtọ́lá Anífálájé informed me that if a person meets this soul of his anywhere on earth, the person dies

immediately. This particular belief may be a way of explaining the remarkable resemblance of a person by another person not related by blood. It seems to be a good mechanism for explaining this phenomenon.

When sacrifices are offered to the ancestral guardian soul in the head, it is eventually accepted by this second one who then takes it to heaven, and offers it to the third one who resides there permanently. In times of crisis, such as illness and unemployment this soul can be contacted by people trained in the art of doing so. In Ile-Ifẹ, there is one such practitioner and there are so many of them in Ekiti, especially in Ọgọ̀tún-Èkìtì.[52] These men call up the ancestral guardian soul of the person (*ẹlẹ́dàá*). The process is as follows. The clients are invited to a room separated into two by a white cloth used as a room-divider. The client may be the mother of the person concerned. A consultation fee is paid to the professional who then gives propitiatory pomade (*ẹ̀rọ̀*) to the client. He then calls the soul of the person. It is believed that the soul of the person will stand on the other side of the curtain which separates the room. The practitioner then invokes the soul, asking it questions about the circumstances of the owner of the soul, the cause of the illness and the correct method of treatment that might be followed. The voice of the person himself can

be heard answering the questions from behind the screen. It is impossible to confirm the truth or otherwise of the claim that it was the person's soul which appears physically behind the curtain because the clients are never allowed to have a look. But this process greatly reassures the clients that help is at hand.

After death, this second soul continues to wander about on earth, but not in the physical form. It can be contacted in the grave; can appear physically as a ghost; can visit his home on earth in spirit form and can even be contacted by the likes of the practitioner shown in the above example.

When a sorcerer attacks a person with medicine, such medicine works against the second soul which roams about.[53] If a person does not offer regular sacrifices to his head and the ancestral guardian soul which resides in the head, there is the belief that such a soul which roams about might accept the bad medicine and consequently transfer it to the soul in the person's head. The soul is then said to have received *ìbòdè*, that is, bad harmful medicine which might lead to illness and death. This explains the reason why the Yoruba pray thus:

My head, supportive one,

Accept good things,

Do not accept evil for me,

Do not accept bad medicine for me.

When the second soul accepts bad medicine (*ìbòdè*) and if it leads to illness for the person, the Yoruba then say that "his inner head is opposed to his outer (second) head". That is to say that the two souls are not in agreement with each other.

The first soul which resides in the head can also be used by a person in an inherently evil manner. It is this soul that a witch sends out at night to the meeting of the guild of witches.[54] The soul is sent in the form of a bird. But if the bird comes to any harm on its trip, or if it gets killed, the witch would die on her bed at home. (Parrinder 1976:125). The soul would then leave the body of the bird and eventually get to heaven for judgement.

The physical and the spiritual attributes all together form what is known to the Yoruba as the person.

But what is a ghost?[55] The ghost is only formed at the death of a person. As soon as a person dies, the second soul which lives on earth elsewhere as a person becomes a ghost. This is possible because this soul is believed to be the exact replica of the person and is believed to be doing similar things like the person, though they might never meet while the person is alive. For example, if the person is

eating at home, the soul in the form of a human will also be eating at the same time somewhere. But shortly after death, the two souls on earth meet each other (that is, the soul in the head and the soul which lives an independent life). At this meeting, the soul in the head commits all undertakings such as appearances to the second soul. While the first soul then goes to heaven, the second one manifests itself as the person in the form of ghosts; hovers around the grave and the deceased's home; answers questions at inquests and remains on earth.

As a ghost, he may appear to anyone, especially members of his family who are unaware of the news of death.[56] It is believed that the dead usually appear to such relatives, only to pay them a brief visit. (Bascom 1969b:75). He would be asked to sit down so that he might be entertained. The dead would then reply that he would not be able to stay for a long time as he is just stopping-over on a trip, that if he were to sit with them for a long time, he would not be able to get back home on time. Soon after the departure of the deceased, the news of his death may be heard either by post or through a messenger. It is then that the hosts are only able to discover that they had been visited by the dead. Reports of these farewell visits are quite common in Yorubaland.

There are certain rules observed by the dead in the undertaking of these visits.[57] First, the dead visits only those who have not heard the news of his death. The dead, because of the great powers acquired at death, can travel a long distance in seconds; can change into any dress he wants in seconds; can read the thoughts of men and can come to the knowledge of what is happening in his acquaintances' homes. It is through this immense knowledge that the dead is able to distinguish those who have heard the news of his death from those who are still unaware of the news, and he therefore visits the latter.

The second rule is that the dead wears one of his earthly dresses on these visits. He does not clad himself in the white shroud used for burials because if he does, his hosts would immediately realize that their visitor is indeed a ghost. In order to conceal this fact, he wears one of the dresses which he used to wear while he was alive.

Third, the dead makes sure that he does not eat, drink or sit for a long time in his hosts' homes. He is usually impatient and leaves before long. As mentioned earlier on, overstaying there goes with the risk of his hosts hearing about the news of death before he leaves. He therefore leaves as soon as possible to avoid this.

Fourth, these visits are paid only to those the dead loved during his lifetime. These may include his children who lived in some other towns, friends and relatives. The dead does not visit his enemies.

Finally, the dead normally avoids visits to places where the truth might be revealed. For example, the dead would not visit a relative who has an enormous knowledge of traditional medicine; who is regarded as powerful or who is thought to have the ability to see spiritual beings. If the dead visits such a man, the man would immediately be aware that the visitor is a ghost. This powerful relative may then throw a handful of soil on the ghost's body. The belief is that the dead would then lose all his powers, put his earthly body on again, go back to his house and continue to live on in the world again until he is old enough to die. The Yoruba believe that this is a possibility and the series of underlying beliefs are as follows. Since the moment of death, throwing soil on the ghost is considered as a taboo. But at burial, soil is used to cover up the body placed in the coffin. But to throw soil on the ghost is to cause *ilẹ̀*, the earth to give the body back to the soul going about in the form of a ghost. The dead, for this reason cleverly avoids such powerful people who can bring them back in this way to the community of the living. For if the dead comes

back in this way, he may not be totally accepted into the society as some people may still regard him as a ghost.

These farewell visits continue for some time, may be for some hours or a day after death and finally stops after burial. Although the ghost may be seen after burial, he is seen then with the white shroud on his body and not in his earthly dresses. The most likely areas where he may be seen are the streets around the cemetery (if he was buried there); or the streets very near his grave if he was buried at home or at some other place. He is thus seen at night, clad in a white shroud used for burial. But in dreams, the dead is continuously seen in his earthly clothes which he is believed to be wearing in heaven. There is the belief that the dead talks quietly to himself as he walks along. Thus if a person has the habit of talking to himself, he is described by the Yoruba as "one who talks quietly to himself like the dead".[58] People distinguish between a ghost and a lunatic because the latter not only talks to himself, he may also be in a semi-naked form or may appear untidy.

When walking at night like this, the ghost takes the risk of having a piece of his white shroud taken away from him by a powerful herbalist, who would then cut a small piece from it and return the bigger piece to the ghost. The bit cut by the herbalist is used as one of the ingredients

to be used in the preparation of certain medicine. It is generally ackowledged by all that confronting and forcibly taking away the ghost's cloth is a very delicate task because of the immense power of the ghost. Herbalists who do this therefore make elaborate preparation before they confront the dead. This include the recitation of incantations and the ingestion of various medicines.[59]

Ghosts of young men and women are believed to be very bold and aggressive, especially if their death have been caused by ill-will. Such ghosts are referred to as "*òkú ìkanra*", meaning "the hostile dead". Some of them, as reports say, walk into their houses openly in the daytime and at night; walk around the walls of the houses in the compound. In doing so they consequently disturb the peace of the community because people run away from them as soon as they are sighted in the house or beside the walls. Ghosts which display such excessive acts of hostility are described as "*òkú gbígbóná*", which literally means "hot ghost". "Hot" here signifies the state of aggression. In real life, when a person is described as being hot, it normally indicates toughness and violence. Here the ghost of the young is regarded as being bold, tough and aggressive because of his untimely death which might have been caused by sorcery or witchcraft.

Ghosts do not manifest themselves to everybody all the time except at odd times like very late in the evenings, during the night and very early in the morning before the day breaks. Yet they are believed to roam the streets all day long, although not everybody can see them. Powerful medicine-men who have ritually washed their faces are believed to be capable of seeing them.[60] It is held that when a death is about to take place in the compound, the ghosts of people who are closely related to the sick person who is about to die would all come to the house to visit the sick and stay there permanently until the death of the person. Hence, it is not uncommon for the terminally ill to mention the names of several deceased people and claim that he is currently seeing them in his room. By staying there with him at the time of his death, the ghosts show the sick that death is not the end of existence, thereby remove the fear of death. They also help the person in his journeys after death by seeing him off to the afterlife. The cat is believed not only to be capable of seeing the ghosts of dead people, but can also communicate with other beings such as witches and sorcerers. The cat is also believed to possess the power to liaise with a person's enemies. Bad medicines and poisons of different sorts can then be given to the cat (by the witch or sorcerer). Putting the poison into the pot

of soup of the person then becomes the work of the cat.[61] The cat is then said to have accepted *ibode* or bad medicine for its owner.[62] Most people therefore do not like to rear the cat. Most ghosts are not harmful. They go peacefully on their own, and there is the belief that for some of the time, they walk with their feet towards the sky and their heads down! (when seen by human beings who have had their faces washed with certain herbs and medicines). But when they appear to humans at any time on their own will, ghosts are seen walking with their feet like ordinary humans. People are always afraid of ghosts and whenever they are seen by humans, they send cold chills down the spine of men. Although ghosts are mostly seen shortly after death, the number of sightings and appearances tend to decrease as time goes on. There may be twenty sightings during the first month after death; this may be followed by just ten sightings during the second month and this may be followed by just one or two more sightings at the end of the fifth or the sixth month after which the ghost may not be seen again.

We may ask the question here: Why is the ghost not seen again ? As we mentioned earlier, the young do not go to heaven because at the time of their death, they were not ripe for death and have not completed their lifespan on

earth. Although it is believed that a person reincarnates on seven successive occasions, this is only true of the old.

Anybody who dies before he is ripe for death has the opportunity to complete his lifespan. Such a person who lives on after his death with the primary purpose of completing his lifespan is known as *àkúdàáyà*.(Bascom 1969b:75).

The *Akudaaya*.

The word *àkúdàáyà* is formed from the verb *dà* which means "change" or "become". The etymology is "*àkú* - *dàá* - *yà*" which can be translated as "the dead - changes - into a new creation". The *àkúdàáyà* is in the form of a person of the same sex as the dead. So if a woman dies, her *àkúdàáyà* would also be a woman of the same age who would travel to a far-away town to start a new life all over again.

The ghost assumes bodily form, the breath comes back into the ghost, the shadow reunites with the ghost and these together constitute the *àkúdàáyà*. The breath is given back to the ghost by God after all the burial ceremonies and rites had been completed by the family of the dead. There are two ways through which the *àkúdàáyà* could be formed and hence there are two different types.

First, all those who die before they are ripe for death evantually become *àkúdàáyà* so that they can complete their span of life. But there is only one rule which they have to observe and that is the fact that they do not complete their lifespan in their town of birth, residence and death. They go to live elsewhere where they would not be recognized and identified. (Parrinder 1972:50 and Bascom 1960:403).

Second, the *àkúdàáyà* could be formed if the dead had prepared and used an appropriate medicinal recipe to facilitate this when he was alive. In this instance, the dead would come back to live among his own family. Both types will be explained in detail below with suitable illustrations.

The First Type of *Akudaaya:*

It is not possible for the dead who was buried by members of his or her family to come back and live among them again. The members of the family had bid him goodbye and he thereupon goes to another town where he is not known and where he would be regarded as a stranger (*àjòjì*). There he rents a room, finds a job and starts living his life at the point at which he left it. For example, if he was forty years old at the time of death, he would start his life in another town as a forty year old man. He may eventually get

married and have children. He lives like any other human being but retains the powers which he acquired at death. As a result of these powers, he is able to travel a long distance in a second; he has the complete knowledge of the spiritual world; can disappear and reappear at will; can send and receive telepathic messages; can read the thoughts of his new friends and acquaintances; can still visit his former family in his first home in the spirit form without beeing seen; and most importantly, has a greatly developed sense of hunch.[63] All these qualities which he has are not known to his associates and new family who all regard him as an ordinary human being or as a migrant from another town. If he is not discovered accidentally by his former relatives and friends, he lives on and completes his lifespan of about seventy to ninety here in this town; dies and gets a decent burial. The soul can then go to the afterlife from where it will be reincarnated for another lifetime. But if he is discovered by his former relatives or friends, he runs away from them and travels to another town to start his life all over again. He might thus be forced to leave the new wife and children, especially if his relatives have disclosed to them that he had lived an earlier life and had died some years before then.

In the past, many people all over Yorubaland believed that a large number of these *àkúdàáyà* actually live in Ile-Ifẹ, where they complete their lifespan or that Ile-Ifẹ is the place where the dead are received. (Idowu 1962:13-14). At the same time, most of the people of Ifẹ believed that a large number of such dead people live in Ìgbẹ́tì where they complete their lifespan. We see here that there is the tendency for people in Yorubaland to associate distant or unfamiliar places with the ideal abode of the *àkúdàáyà*.

In some parts of Yorubaland, there are evening markets. (Sudarkasa 1973:43). Paraffin lamps are used for lighting purposes by most of the traders. It is consequently very difficult to see clearly and identify most of the traders in the darkness. Most of the traders in these markets are believed to be dead people who come there to trade under the cover of darkness to prevent people from identifying them. These markets are sometimes referred to as *ọjà òkú*, "the market of the dead". We should note that spirits and animals from the forest, who changed their form to humans are also believed to be among the traders and shoppers in such markets.[64] They are believed to go back into the forest at the close of the market where they change their form back to that of spirits and animals. (Yemitan 1963:19-23; Drewal & Drewal 1990:79).[65] Whereas the spirits and animals can

change into humans and attend the markets during the day, the dead cannot attend markets situated near their former homes during the day for fear of being identified by their relatives and friends. We shall now look at an example of this category of *àkúdàáyà*.

An Ife Man (Circa 1966):

A man died in Ile-Ifẹ in 1956.[66] It was believed that he went to live in another town, Ọ̀yán with a view to completing his lifespan there. He got married there and had children. The wife regarded him as a stranger, although he informed her that he was of Ife origin. After some years, his wife and children mounted excessive pressure on him, asking him to let them all pay a visit to his home in Ile-Ifẹ. Friends and neighbours of the couple also intervened, taking sides with the wife. When the request became persistent, the husband selected a date for the family's visit to Ife to show them his compound, parents and relatives. They arrived at Ile-Ifẹ, left in a taxi for the man's street. Shortly before they arrived at the husband's home, he got permission to alight from his wife and children, saying that he wanted to buy bread, sweet and biscuits. It is the custom of the Yoruba to distribute such gifts to people, having missed their company for quite some

time. But before he alighted from the vehicle, he showed his family compound to them at the end of the road by pointing in the direction. His wife and children alighted in the front of the house, went inside and introduced themselves adding that the head of the family would join them shortly. The man's parents introduced themselves to the visitors. The parents then showed the photographs of their son to the visitors for possible identification. His grave was also shown to the visitors, having informed them that he died twelve years before then. The man never joined his family who continued to live in Ile-Ifẹ. The children were consequently accepted into the lineage.

Particular Features of this first category of *Àkúdàáyà*:

Most importantly, the *àkúdàáyà* as seen in the above example retained the powers which he gained at death. The *àkúdàáyà* is always a complete stranger in his new town of residence. All worldly ties in the earlier life are broken and new ties are instituted in place. He is therefore not in the midst of those who had known him in his former lifetime. This accounts for the reason why complete strangers, especially those whose parents and relatives are not known are sometimes also regarded as an *àkúdàáyà* in the Yoruba society.[67]

As soon as the *àkúdàáyà* arrives in his new town of residence, he enters into a new profession; sets up a shop or gets a new job which might not be related to his former job. This is so because a certificate earned in an earlier lifetime could not be used again in the next town of residence. It is not possible because the dead does not take with him, in physical form, any of his worldly properties.

The *àkúdàáyà* almost always sets up a new family in his new town of residence.[68] He or she does not inform the new partner of an earlier life elsewhere as nobody in the Yoruba society really want to get married to the dead.

The dead leaves his new town of residence as soon as he is discovered there by relatives or friends, who in most cases, are long-distance traders. He moves away because the news of his personality and early life may spread quickly around the town. The people may then regret that they had been associated with him during his short stay with them. They may then be tempted to ridicule and ostracise him. He leaves for a new town to avoid all these troubles.

Finally, the ghost of a person who becomes an *àkúdàáyà* is not seen again in its physical form, in the town of his earlier life. It is the ghost, with the first ancestral guardian soul, the breath and the shadow which join together to form the new person. Although the dead can still visit

his first home, he does so in the form of a spirit and would not be seen in the physical form by anybody there. But he can still hover around the grave; can accept libations, offerings and sacrifices. He can visit his former home as often as he likes, and can punish or reward his children who live there. He is also believed to be capable of protecting his children from the wrath of their enemies.

The belief is that the *àkúdàáyà* goes into this new phase of existence with all the five senses in an unimpaired state. For example, a man who was blind in his first lifetime would start his new life after death with his eyesight restored. The senses are believed to be restored through the powers which the dead acquired at death. Nobody can differentiate between an *àkúdàáyà* and an ordinary human being. The former is also a human being who behaves and acts normally like any other person. It is only those people who knew him in his former lifetime that can actually identify him as an *àkúdàáyà*.

The Second Type of *Àkúdàáyà*:

The Yoruba have a strong belief in the efficacy of traditional medicines made from herbs, leaves, roots, animals and various other things. There is a particular medicine which when prepared and ingested by a person has

the power to make him become an *àkúdàáyà* of a different type after death. While the first category of *àkúdàáyà* starts his life in another town, this second category dies and "resurrects" from the dead a few moments after death. People, members of his family inclusive, are not therefore aware that he was dead and could therefore continue to live with his family. He is able to come back to life again each time he dies for six times. When he dies after that, he dies a final death and would not be raised up again. This secret is only known to him and to the herbalist who prepared the medicine for him. We shall now examine an example from this category.

1. <u>Ogunsọla of Osògún Compound, Ile-Ifẹ:</u>[69]

During the Nigerian/Biafran civil war which started in 1967 and ended in 1970, one Ògúnsọlá of Osògún Compound joined the Nigerian Army and was drafted to the war front. He was reported killed in the fighting. The military authorities therefore transported his wife, children and properties to Ile-Ifẹ. When his parents were informed of the death, the father was reported to have said that his son might not have been killed. Three months later, Ogunsọla the soldier came back home alive.

Particular Features of the Second Category of *Àkúdàáyà:*

The dead person here has the opportunity of living with his family until he completes his lifespan. (This is the basic advantage which those in this category has over those in the first category who leave their first home for a distant town where he is not known). The family, relatives and friends are normally unaware of the death of the person because he resumes living shortly after death without any trace of the injuries which might cause his death. For example, we see Ogunṣọla the soldier who went back to his family in Ile-Ifẹ three months after the news of his death. No signs of bullets were found on his body.

Secondly, this class of *àkúdàáyà* is brought into being by the use of traditiõal medicine, but it is generally acknowledged that such medicines are usually hard to come by. Renowned herbalists, *Ifá* priests and hunters who are versed in medicines do not commit their knowledge to writing. When they pass away most of their knowledge become lost. Those who ingest this particular medicine had some initial difficulty in their search for a person who had the knowledge of the medicine.[70]

Thirdly, the person vigorously denies the reports of his death as soon as he shows up in the city. If he does not do so, people may not regard him as a proper human being

again and they therefore tend to avoid him. In the example above, we see Ogunṣọla's father who insisted that his son was alive. He did so, most probably because he was aware that his son had ingested the medicine.

Furthermore, the person observes the relevant taboos prescribed for him by the medicineman at the time the medicine was given to him. If he fails in this respect, the ingested medicine becomes ineffective and when he dies, he is buried and consequently becomes the natural type of *àkúdàáyà* who travels to another town to start his life all over again.

On a final note, lucid and strong eyewitness accounts of the reports of death may sometimes force an *àkúdàáyà* of this second category to become an *àkúdàáyà* of the first category. In other words, the *àkúdàáyà* who comes back to his family may become the one who travels to a distant, far-away town to live if the evidence of his death is unassailable.

We now have to address the reasons why a person desires to become the type of *àkúdàáyà* who continues to live with his family.[71] The desire to continue to live with one's kith and kin is the most important reason. An average Yoruba person does not like to be separated from his relatives, especially through death. A man's wife and most importantly, his children are his greatest possession in the world. The

need to contribute to the moral development of the children, and their general upbringing are of paramount importance to a man. He also likes to see the children complete their education, or learn a trade; get married have offspring of their own and therefore ensure the perpetuation of the family name. (Ilesanmi 1982:108). Furthermore, the fear of the unknown is another reason for the desire to become an *àkúdàáyà* who continue to live in his house. This situation is preferred to going to live in a strange, far-away town where new relationships have to be established and a new house has to be built or rented. There is also the desire to complete an unfinished project, for example, a building project, or a farming venture. As the man normally has a profession which he currently practises, which might be a profitable one, there is therefore the wish to continue this rather than enter into a new one. Finally, the average Yoruba man generally likes to live till a ripe old age (because old age is very much respected) and if possible ascend to the position of the head of the compound and lineage.

Men are the ones who use the medicine which would make them become *àkúdàáyà*. Women do not use this particular medicine. They rather take solace in having children and in watching them grow up into adults. The idea that they may be

reincarnated as grand-daughters and great grand-daughers is an adequate consolation for them. The *Àkúdàáyà*-inducing medicine is regarded by women as "strong medicine". It is therefore seen as a type of medicine that is too strong for the feminine physique.

The belief in the *àkúdàáyà* phenomenon is not simply a theoretical idea; it is a social mechanism for sorting people out. In the Yoruba society, one is not completely sure of some people's background. If nobody visits a stranger, he may be suspected of being an *àkúdàáyà*. We shall now examine the belief of the Yoruba about death and sleep.

Death and Sleep:

Sleep is known as *orun* among the Yoruba. Sleep is likened to death in many myths and legends. (Lucas 1948:224). Death and Sleep are regarded as children of the same parents; death being the elder of the two. When a person dies, the words used to express this is "*ó kú*", which means "he dies"; but when a person sleeps, the words used to express this is "*ó sùn*", which means, "he sleeps".

Death is likened to sleep because it is sometimes seen as a state of sleep, of complete rest. This explains the reason why the Yoruba normally arrange the dead as if it is

sleeping quietly. At the same time, sleep is sometimes used in common speech to express the state of death. In this respect, I recall the conversation which took place between my uncle and I, in July 1985. He has just bought a new lace dress and I asked him if he would be wearing it to the church on the following Sunday. He replied that he would wear the dress for the first time whenever his mother sleeps. This is a common usage and we still find all over Yorubaland that when a person dies, he is said to be in the state of sleep.[72]

In most of the Western Churches in Yorubaland, and specifically at St. Philip's Anglican Cathedral, Ayetoro, Ile-Ife, I have watched successive vicars over the years referred to the deceased during the burial services as "our brother/sister who slept in the Lord". We see the vicar here using "sleep" as a euphemism for death. The most vivid and famous account of the death of a person regarded as not dead but sleeping which has become a classic and comforting story for Yoruba christians is the story of the death and resurrection of Lazarus. We recall Jesus saying "our friend Lazarus sleepeth". (John 11,11).

The Yoruba say "Sleep is the means of getting to know what death really is". The implication of this is that the experiences, such as travels and other activities in dreams

which one has during sleep is much the same as the experiences which one would expect to have in the state of death. During sleep, one could travel and find himself in a different, far-away country. In a similar manner, the dead is believed to start on his travels soon after death.

Nobody is actually aware of the exact moment when he falls asleep every night. So also is a man unaware of the moment of his death. (This is a general rule and the exceptions would be discussed later). Death takes place, in most cases silently, just like sleep. According to Chief M.A. Fabunmi,[73] when a person sleeps and does not have any dream, he has had a complete period of rest. This deep slumber is also likened to the state of complete relaxation of the dead when it is displayed in the house before burial.

Most of the time, sleep is seen as a path through which death comes to a person. At such times, the person sleeps, dies and does not wake up again. Of such person, the Yoruba say that "he has passed from the state of sleep unto death". Sleep is therefore seen as a transitional way to death. He who dies in this way is said to have "died with his hands beneath his head". (or, in other words, he has died with his hands being used as a pillow beneath his head).[74] This is to say that the person has died peacefully, and that he was

in a position of rest at the time of death. It may be noted here that the Yoruba normally sleeps with one hand placed on the pillow beneath the head, with the person also lying on his side.

Just as the state of sleep is seen as a means of maintaining communication through dreams between the living, the dead, the world and other sacred beings, so also is the similar state of death believed to have a line of much deeper communication with the living, the world and the after-life. Both states are therefore seen as being alike, and are regarded as means through which deep revelation can be gained by the person. In the case of the living who sleeps, the revelation of what may happen to him, and what to expect in the world; and for the dead, through the process of death, the secrets of the world, death and of the after-life.

Reference is implicitly made to the day of death by the Yoruba when they refer to it as "*ọjọ́ àtisùn*", that is , "the day of sleep". In this connection, they have a saying which goes as follows: "Wicked behaviour does not prevent a person from becoming an adult. Nor does it prevent him from attaining old age. But the problem lies with the day of sleep".[75] Here we see that sleep is used as an euphemism for

death. Sleep and Death are therefore likened to one another.[76]

Other Euphemisms for Death:

Apart from sleep which is used as a euphemism for death, there are many other words and phrases which are used for the same purpose. It is important to examine this because by doing so, we would be able to perceive the thoughts of the Yoruba about death.

When a person dies, the verb used for this is "*ku*", that is, "die". But a king who dies in Yorubaland is said to have gone up into the rafter or the ceiling,[77] (*ó wàjà*). On the other hand, when a chief dies, he is said to have stubbed his foot against a stone, that is, "*o fese ko*". *Àjà*, the rafter is the pinnacle of the house. The king is here thought to have ascended to the highest level of existence after death, the level which is invariably denied to all other mortals. The king is accorded this respect because he is seen as the father of all his subjects, and in the case of the *Ọọ̀ni* of Ifẹ̀, he is also seen as a sacred king. (Lloyd 1960:228). At his death, he is thought to ascend into the ceiling where he is received by all the divinities.[78] Besides, the rafter is the place used for keeping the *egúngún* masquerades' costumes and masks and other valuable

properties of the generation. It is therefore seen as a sacred place, where the ancestors of the family may meet on certain special occasions. The ceiling, *aja* is also a place prohibited for women to enter because of the important secret items and medicines stored there for safe-keeping. It is therefore quite obvious why the king is thought not to have died but entered the ceiling. But this also connotes the immortality of the office. (Willett 1967:27).

As for the chief (*ìjòyè*), who is said to have stubbed his foot against a stone at death, the interpretation is not far-fetched. Writing earlier on, on the concept of personality, we discussed the implication of stubbing one's foot against a stone. Everyone knows the foot, which if stubbed against a stone portends good luck and the one which if stubbed against a stone portends bad luck or evil. (Lucas 1948:250). While some chiefs are ritual priests who offer sacrifices to their respective divinities on behalf of the king and the people, others are mere administrators, others yet judges in the customary courts and yet others, advisers to the king. From all these categories of chiefs, the king and the people demand absolute loyalty and commitment. They are expected to be honest, fair and of good character. From those who perform rites and offer sacrifices to the divinities, the king and the people expect sincerity and the

correct performance of the rites. At his death, the desert of the chief now depends on whether he has been good or bad in the performance of his duties. If he has been good, then he is assumed to have stubbed the proper foot on the stone; and if he has been bad, he is deemed to have stubbed the improper foot on the stone.[79] Whatever happens, he is thus said to have stubbed his foot against a stone. In general figurative usage, when an ordinary person is said to have stubbed his foot against a stone, it is meant that he or she has most probably made a terrible mistake and that a bad thing has happened to him as a result.

When an old person dies, people often say that he has changed his phase of existence. The word used here is *papòdà*, the etymology of which is *pa-ipò-dà*, which literally translated means "changes-position-into-another". (Lawal 1977:54). The deceased is hereby said to have changed his state from that of a human being to an ancestor who lives in the afterlife.

Because the dead is wrapped in a white shroud before burial, people sometimes say that the person leaves his head there to be wrapped up, that is "*tẹ́rí́ gbasọ*". The etymology is "*tẹ́-orí́-gba-asọ*", which literally means "lays the head down and allows the head to be wrapped up with clothes". (Gbadamosi & Beier 1967:5). Before burial, the dead is

displayed on a decorated bed and is wrapped up in white shroud. As the dead looks as if he is sleeping deeply, it is reckoned that he lays down to be wrapped up for burial.

At other times, the dead is said to have become a person who goes into the earth, *ilẹ̀*. The phrase for this is "he has become a person of the earth". (Abimbola 1973a:61). The dead is always buried in the ground by the Yoruba and other forms of body disposal such as cremation are not allowed. The act of burial literally makes the dead go into the earth. Besides, the dead goes into the ground shortly after death for interrogation by the inhabitants of the ground. He therefore stays there for a limited number of days. During this short period of time, he has become an inhabitant of the earth. The corpse having been buried in the earth for some time rots, and becomes humus soil. This may also account for the saying that the dead has become a "person of the earth".

In ordinary usage, a person who dies is sometimes said to have gone out of existence. The exact phrase used is *ó sàìsí* which literally translated means "he has ceased to exist". A person who dies is not seen again as a physical entity who could live with his family. Although he might be seen in apparitions, the main avenue for seeing him in physical form remains the dream. The emphasis here is

therefore placed on the inability to see him in physical form as a human being again.

When a person dies, people sometimes say that he has become deceased; the word used in this case is *dolóògbé*. From this word, *olóògbé* can be extracted. This means "the deceased". When the word itself is split up, it can actually mean "the person who dozes". The state of death , that is perpetual sleep is indirectly referred to. Here the dead is said to be in eternal sleep.

Yámùtù is another Yoruba word sometimes used to express the verb "die". It was originally borrowed from the Hausa language and is only used when the speaker is in a lighter mood.

The Yoruba normally cover themselves with a big light-weight cloth every night when they go to bed. This cloth is known as "cover-cloth". At burial, earth is heaped on the coffin and used to cover it up. The dead has thus used the earth to cover itself up, just like the living uses the cover-cloth to cover himself at night. Thus when a person dies, the Yoruba sometimes say that he has used the earth to cover himself up as a cover-cloth.

At other times, the dead is said to have "passed away". This is in fact a shortened form of "passed away from this world to the afterlife". This is also related to the idea

that the dead has travelled home. To express it in this sense, the Yoruba say of the dead: "he has gone home". Here the afterlife is seen as the proper, ideal and real home of man while the world is seen as a temporary phase of existence, a market-place, *ọjà*, where people meet for a short time during the day only to disperse to go to their various homes. As Drewal and Drewal (1983:2) correctly put it, the Yoruba say "the world is a market-place, heaven is home". The market and the world is thus seen as a transient place which is replaced for the dead at death by a permanent, real home.

Heaven is also known to the Yoruba as *ọ̀run alákeji*.[80] (Abimbọla 1973a:61). The meaning of *alákeji* is "the maker of rain". Here, heaven is said to be owned by the maker of the rain which falls down on man. A person who dies is thus believed to have gone to the heaven created and owned by Olodumare, who is the maker of rain. Of the dead they therefore say that he has gone to the heaven of *alákeji*. This same heaven is sometimes called *ọ̀run àrèmabọ̀*, which means "the heaven to which a person goes and does not return". It is in this connection that the Yoruba say that the dead has become a citizen of heaven.

When a person dies, it is sometimes expressed that "he has stopped breathing". Here, it is ackowledged that death

takes place at the cessation of breathing. It is also in this respect that the Yoruba sometimes say that "the owner of the breath has taken it". Here, Olodumare is seen as the owner of the breath (Farrow 1926:27) who also takes it back at death. As he owns the breath, he also has the right to take it back whenever he likes. Thus whenever the Yoruba is fixing a date for a ceremony, they add a phrase to the oral invitation expressed to people. For example, a man who wants to celebrate the funeral of his mother may, when inviting his friends say, "..we will celebrate the funeral of my mother on December 21, if the owner of the breath has not taken it by then". The person is saying here that he would take part in the celebration if he is still alive by that date.

As mentioned earlier, the dead is wrapped before burial with several layers of white shroud, with all the parts of the body including the legs covered adequately. This white shroud is called *mọ̀tí́n-ì̀n*. It is also called *t́éru*. The dead is therefore sometimes said to have kicked the shroud. This is similar to the English coarse slang of saying that a person has kicked the bucket.

The death of the young is a sad event and it is deeply felt by the Yoruba. It is regarded as a sorrowful death, to be mourned and lamented greatly.It is therefore called *ò̀kú*

ọ̀fọ̀, which means "mournful and lamentable death". Thus when a young man dies, people often say that such a person has "become a thing of mourning and lamentation."

Finally, the earth is said to have "eaten up" a dead person. Here people express the idea that a death has taken place, that the person concerned has been put into the ground, that the body would eventually decompose, and become humus soil.

By looking at the meaning of the various words and phrases used to express the state of death, we have been able to see some of the ideas connected with death among the Yoruba. The main points are as follows. The king is said to have gone into the rafter , which is located beneath the roof of the house. It is a place where the masquerade costumes and other secret items of the family are kept. The place is therefore seen as the appropriate place for the dead king. As for the chief, he is said to have stubbed his foot against a stone. Most of the words and phrases used for the death of commoners express either the change of existence; the abode of the dead before and after burial; and its travels and journeys to the world beyond which is regarded as the dead's real home.

Summary:

The Yoruba beliefs about death are multifaceted and complex. Death is believed to be a spiritual being who kills his victims with a big club. The Yoruba see death not as an end of man, but as a transition from this earthly world to a new realm of existence. While the old may reincarnate after death in their offspring, the young who died are believed to travel to another town where they will become *àkúdàáyà* and continue to live until they are ripe enough for death. The old also become ancestors and continue to live in heaven.

It is the belief of the Yoruba that every human being has seven lifespans to live, that is to say, a person comes back to this world repeatedly as a baby for seven times. He then stays permanently in heaven after this; his whole lifespans and cycles of births having been completed. If the deceased was a bad person on earth, he may be turned into a plant or an animal in another lifetime. There is also some sort of retributive judgement which the offspring of the bad will suffer on earth.

The Yoruba liken death and sleep and use other euphemisms for death. Shortly after a young person's death, his ghost may be seen around the house for some time. The

ghost will not be seen again when he left the neighbourhood to become an *àkúdaàyà*.

Because the dead are believed to reside in the afterlife and assume more powers through the process of death, they are approached at their graves, where their offspring commune with them, pour libations and seek help.

The celebration of the correct burial rites is essential because it is believed to help separate the living from the dead and eases the journeys of the dead to the afterlife.[81] If the correct rites are not performed, the dead may not be properly separated from the living and he may be inhibited in his journeys to the afterworld. (Lucas 1948:223).[82]

Endnotes:

1. These names are not proper ones and have no meanings.

2. Personal communication, August 12,1989.

3. Verse collected on 15th August 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ, Nigeria.

4. "Appease" here means "to beg, soothe or implore" Death. Ifa priests help their clients to do this by offering sacrifices. Other divine beings can also be appeased in this way to stop their anger and seek their cooperation. (Abimbola 1975:391).

[5]. Informant: Chief M.O. Fashọgbọn, Personal Communication, August 4, 1990.

[6]. See also Abimbọla 1973b:74.

[7]. One of the excesses is as follows: During this period, there was a famine on Earth; people who went to Heaven were allowed to eat as much as they wanted and were asked to take a limited amount of food back to Earth. But most of them carried more than they needed; depleting the quantity in Heaven. This led to scarcity of food for those who remained in Heaven. (Personal Communication, Pa. Braimọh Ajayi, Ìlọ́rọ̀, Ile-Ifẹ, July 6, 1989). See Beier (1955:24) for more examples of such stories.

[8]. See also Idowu 1962:187.

[9]. A titled Ifa priest who recited this verse for me on 8th August 1990.

[10]. The death of the young is a problem and the Yoruba find it difficult to explain why the young should die while the very old still live. This myth is thus used by them to explain this problem and help them to come to an understanding of why the young die.

[11]. This translation and all others (of poems, songs and sayings) in this thesis are mine, except otherwise stated.

[12]. They were those old men who were not pleased with the situation.

[13]. That is in terms of wealth, properties and wives.

[14]. For some other examples, see G.J.A. Ojo (1966:220). A shooting star also shows that an important person is going to die or has just died. The Anuaks too share this belief with the Yoruba. (Lienhardt 1970:281).

[15]. Personal Communication, August 12, 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ.

[16]. G.J.A. Ojo says libation to the ancestors is also an offering to the earth since the liquid has to pass through the soil to get into the grave. He mentions another function which libation serves: that of making "the accomodation of the revered departed within" the earth "comfortable". (1966 :168).

[17]. For more on the Central Hall, see Chief M.O.Fashọgbọn's The Principles of The Ancient Constitutional History of Ile - Ife Ooyelagbo, page 9.

[18]. The first Ifa verse was recited for me by Chief 'Tunji Adeyẹfa on August 15, 1990.

[19]. It is interesting to compare this Yoruba belief to the Maori belief documented by Robert Hertz (in Needham 1967:3-31) where the masculine nature of man is said to be on the right hand side while the feminine nature is said to be on the left side.

[20]. In a personal communication, on 14th June 1989.

[21]. See also Awolalu 1980:31.

22. The interview was conducted at Ile-Ifẹ on 15th June, 1989.

23. Among the Tallensi, the character of a person when alive does not debar him from becoming an ancestor at death. (Fortes 1987:76).

24. In Dande, Northern Zimbabwe, the deceased who had no child cannot become *midzimu*, (an ancestor) as it is held that they do not have children who can "look after" them or "act as mediums for them". (Lan 1985:35).

25. Willett (1960:28) believes that it is possible to recognize a reincarnated ancestor without reverting to divination by "recurrent facial types within" the family.

26. Earth is also home.

27. This means "heaven". Idowu (1962:189) gives the meaning directly as "Afterlife".

28. For Awoniyi (1975:364-5), "To be an *Ọmọlúàbí* is to be of good character in all its ramifications". See also Awolalu 1970:25; Abimbọla 1975:393-5 and Babalola 1989:155.

29. Idowu 1962:155.

30. Chief 'Tunji Adeyẹfa, Personal Communication, August 16, 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ.

31. This may mean: in the afterlife or after both of them might have reincarnated to start another lifetime.

[32]. The late Chief M.A. Fabunmi, Personal Communication, August 12, 1989 at Ile-Ife.

[33]. The question may be asked; if heaven is home, why do ancestors want to return to the world? Bascom provides an appropriate answer: "It is not that the good heaven is not pleasant, but one wishes to return to earth in another generation to be with his children and grandchildren". (1969b:76).

[34]. See also Parrinder (in E.W.Smith, ed., African Ideas of God), 1950a:230.

[35]. Pa. Bamidele Akinwande, Personal Communication, 22nd August, 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ.

[36]. See also Alison Izzett 1955:29.

[37]. See also Awolalu 1980:32.

[38]. See also Bascom 1960:404.

[39]. There is a consensus of opinions by many scholars on the features of the good heavens. For example, see Ray 1976:144; Parrinder 1972:50f; and Bascom 1969a:115.

[40]. Bascom was probably referring to these appeals when he wrote that "..Ọlọrun judges cases". (1969b:75).

[41]. A baby girl born with no vaginal opening.

[42]. Gerth and Mills, ed., From Max Weber : Essays in Sociology.

[43]. Mrs. Dorcas Tijuara Adegoke and the late Madam Comfort Adeyoola Adegoke, Personal Communication, 5th and 6th August, 1989 at Ile-Ifẹ.

[44]. From a song by the Yoruba musician, Ebenezer "Obey" Fabiyi, 1974.

[45]. This means "continuous victory over one's enemies".

[46]. For another version of the list of these good things, see Bascom 1969a:54-55; 1980:8; Awolalu 1970:37.

[47]. James Johnson (1899:51) notes that this soul is not liable to death.

[48]. Mitchell (1977:47) infers that it is an active force guiding the individual in his or her life.

[49]. See also Bascom 1960:409; 1969a:114.

[50]. The day on which the soul must return to heaven is also fixed at this time. It cannot be altered or extended except in the case of suicides. Bad medicines, witchcraft and sorcery may also shorten a person's span of life. (Bascom 1969a:115-116).

[51]. Bascom 1960:406 & 409; 1969b:73.

[52]. The art of doing this is highly developed in Ekiti.

[53]. On sorcery among the Yoruba, see (Maclean 1974:27 & 32). The Yoruba notion of sorcery is essentially the same with that of the Cewa of Zimbabwe, who see the sorcerer as one

who causes illness and death to his victims by the use of magical preparations. (Marwick 1965: 9, 75-77).

54. Morton-Williams (1956:327) defines witchcraft as "a capacity that is believed to exist in some individuals, enabling its possessor to cause bodily harm to another without attacking him physically.."

55. Parrinder (1976:137) defines a ghost as "an apparition or spectre of a dead person".

56. James Johnson (1899:51) also notes that after the death of a person, the soul travels about the world for some time.

57. Chief 'Tunji Adeyefa and Mr. Awosise, Personal Communication at Ile-Ife on 18th August, 1990.

58. Chief M.O. Fashọgbọn, Personal Communication, August 9, 1989 at Ile-Ife.

59. Personal Communication, Late Mr. Josiah Adebisi Adegoke, 4th July, 1977 at Ile-Ifẹ. Parrinder notes that sorcerers are said to seize ghosts for use as slaves and for evil "purposes" in South Africa. (1976:137).

60. By washing the face with medicine in this way, a man prepares himself for seeing not only spiritual beings, but also for knowing the events of the future. (Maclean 1974:94).

61. See Maclean 1974:42 and Parrinder 1976:126.

62. It is believed that the owl can be used for the same evil purpose. (Farrow 1926:126)

63. Used in this way, hunch means "an intuitive feeling or conjecture". Tulloch (ed.), Complete Wordfinder, p. 729.

64. Drewal and Drewal 1990:134.

65. Hence, the Yoruba enjoin young men and women not to marry anybody met in the market-place unless lengthy enquiries about the person's place of birth, parentage and place of present residence are made. This is to prevent people marrying spiritual beings and animals in human form by mistake.

66. Informants: Pa. Bamidele Akinwande and Pa. Ọladimeji, Personal Communication, September 2, 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ.

67. Parrinder (1972:50) gives as examples, some traders at Dugbẹ market in Ibadan.

68. See also Awolalu 1980:32.

69. Informant: Mr. Olu Adesanmi, Personal Communication, 15th August, 1990 at Ìlọ́rọ̀, Ile-Ifẹ.

70. Mr. Olu Adesanmi and Mr. Idowu Adesanmi, Personal Communication on August 27, 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ.

71. This section is based on interviews with people who are believed to have ingested the medicines, their relatives and herbalists. Interviews were held on various dates between 2nd and 28th August, 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ.

72. In ancient Greece, sleep was also likened to death. (Vermeule 1981:13).

73. On July 15, 1989 in Ile-Ifẹ.

74. *ibid.*

75. See Awoniyi (1975:377) for another version of this saying.

76. This is also implied in Ajuwọn (1989:194): "..sleep never to wake again". See also Ogunniran (1973:22).

77. Lawuyi & Olupọna (1988:6). There is a similar belief among the Dinka. When a master of the fishing-spear is buried alive, people say that "the master has gone to sit". (Lienhardt 1961:314). See also Lawal 1977:56.

78. Abraham's view on this is that it is believed in Ile-Ifẹ that the King becomes an *òrìsà* at death. (1958:279). See also Pemberton (1989:143).

79. Chief 'Tunji Adeyẹfa, Personal Communication on August 15, 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ.

80. Heaven is also known as *Ìkọ̀lé Ọ̀run*, the sphere of heaven. (Bascom 1980:18).

81. For reference to funeral rites "as journeys", see M.T. Drewal (1992:xiii).

82. We also note that mortuary rites are celebrated among the Ẹdo of Nigeria to "ensure the deceased his rightful

place in *ẹrinbhin* (the world of the dead)". (Bradbury 1969:131).

Chapter 3.

CLASSIFICATION OF DEATH.

In this chapter, the ways in which the Yoruba classify death will be discussed. Death is classified according to the different ways or manner in which death came to the affected person. This explains the reason why the Yoruba is basically worried about three major sayings about death. First, that no one knows the exact time or day of his death (Abimbola 1973a:59). Not having the knowledge is seen as being bad because the person would not have made proper arrangements about who should inherit his wives, about how his properties should be distributed to his children, about how he should be buried, the types of rites to be performed and the question of who succeeds him in the many cults, societies and associations to which he belonged.

At the same time, the Yoruba is relieved that the day of his death is not known to him. There is the saying "he who knows the day of his death would misbehave".[1] The meaning of this is that in an attempt to make the above arrangements before his death, he might step on the toes of a few people who may not appreciate the size of the properties allocated to them. Besides, if the dying man is a sorcerer, he might be tempted to use his medicines

to harm scores of people before his death. Knowing the day of death is therefore not desirable.

The second saying is that the type of death or the manner by which it would come is not known. Although this may not be known to man, his destiny on this is believed to be fixed and cannot change.[2] Hence the Yoruba say "he who would be killed by a falling tree would never be carried away by a river". The manner of the death of each person is therefore believed to be determined by the destiny which he chose in heaven.

The third saying is that no one knows where he would be at the time of death and no one is sure of the exact place where he would be buried. It is with this in their mind that the Yoruba say "the head (that is, the person) does not know the sleeping place (that is, the site of the grave), if he knew, he could have gone there to decorate the place".[3] The site of a person's grave is thus seen as a hallowed place which should, if known, be decorated in preparation for the time of death.

Even if a person has, before his death, prepared a place for his grave, he might not be buried there. If he dies in a car accident several hundred miles away from home, the body could have been mutilated beyond recognition. This might then necessitate the remains of

the person and those of other victims being buried elsewhere by the State. The place which the person has earmarked for himself would then be unutilized.

The Good and Bad death:

The Yoruba classify death into two broad categories: the good and the bad death. (Ọlatunji 1975:69). The good marked by a tinge of joy and the bad marked by weeping, sadness and mourning. The death of the old is regarded as good death,[4] especially if the person dies in his or her sleep. This is similar to the Lugbara notion of good death in which "the physical and social deaths are reasonably proper and congruent". (Middleton 1982:142-144).[5]

When a person dies in a violent way, it is seen as a bad death. Death through car accident is an example but there are worse ones such as death by self-hanging (*okùnso*). The circumstances which surround the latter is indeed grim. A person who hangs himself is believed to have renounced the world; to have killed himself most probably because he has done something bad. This death is seen as bad not only because of its violent nature but especially because the corpse will have to be given to the ritual priests of the divinity concerned. This type of death is labelled *ikú gbígbóná,* "hot death".[6]

The availability of the corpse for burial by the kin of the dead is a factor that is considered in the classification of death as good and bad. When the corpse is buried by members of the compound (even if the death is violent), the death is not seen as being too bad. An example is the burial of a person killed in a car accident.[7] But when the corpse is handed over to the ritual priest of a particular divinity for burial, the corpse may not be seen again and the grave may not be located at all by the family of the deceased. As far as the affected family is concerned, the dead is lost. Identification of the grave is very important to the Yoruba. In times of crisis, the children of the deceased can contact their parent at his grave, take food or drinks there to give to the dead, pour libations there, offer kola nuts to the dead and ask the dead for continuous protection. It is for this reason that the loss of the corpse and the absolute non-possession of a grave by the dead is considered to be disastrous.

Lastly, when the dead is survived by children, it is seen as a good death,[8] especially if the children are old enough to celebrate the funeral of their parent. Children are seen as the greatest possession by the Yoruba[9] and are seen as replacements for the parents and

for the continuity of the family and the lineage. One's children also inherit one's properties and do not let the family home become desolate. The children not only take care of the parents in their old age but also protect and defend them against their adversaries.[10] On the importance of children, the Yoruba say:

Children are a thing of beauty,
Children are as valued as brass.
When one's daughter has big hips,
One cannot put beads on the loins
Of another person's child.
One's child inherits one's properties.
When the fire dies out,
It leaves ashes behind.
When the banana tree dies,
It leaves young trees/suckers behind.
When a person dies,
Others remain behind.
One's children bury one,
And perform the necessary rites,
One's children survive after one's death.
Children, marvelous children, who care for one,
Children make one looks stylish in the world.[11]

Those who have children are considered lucky as they have people who will perform the necessary rites for them and bury them. (Ilesanmi 1982:108). But as the Yoruba say, when one has children while he is still alive, one should not be too happy at the realization that one is indeed a parent. It is only those who have surviving children who can fund the parents' funeral rites that can be referred to as those who have children. In this respect, they say "Having children is not yet a thing of joy, having children to perform the necessary rites for one after death is the test by which one knows if one has children".[12]

When a man dies and leaves children behind him, the Yoruba say that he has died in the arms of his children. It is a good death. In the past, and even sometimes today, the old prefer to have at least one of their children with them when they feel that the time of death is near. As soon as they feel that they may cease breathing in a short time to come, they invite one of their children to hold them in his/her arms. The old then physically dies in the son/daughter's arms, thus achieving the ambition of dying in the arms of his child.

The significance of this is that the man has passed the mantle of life of his own generation to that of the

generation of his children. They are to represent him and continue the line. If the deceased was a woman and a witch, it is believed that the power of witchcraft is actually passed on to the daughter at the time of death.[13]

Death is thus seen to be classified as good or bad according to the age at which it comes, the manner of death, the surrounding circumstances, whether the corpse is available or whether the site of the grave can be identified, and finally whether the dead is survived by children. We will now look at the concept of longevity in the thought of the Yoruba.

The Issue of Longevity in Yoruba Religious Thought.

Old age is one of the most important gifts which a Yoruba man desires from God. (Akiwọwọ 1983:13). Aged people are greatly respected in the society. Since succession to the Baale is based on seniority by age, everybody prays for a long life so that he may attain this enviable position later on in life. But in few cases, some die in their youth or in middle life.

Because of the difficulties, joys, sufferings, labours, enjoyment, sorrow and hardship which they have experienced in the period of their long stay on earth,

the old are acknowledged as men and women of immense wisdom and great knowledge. (Drewal & Drewal 1983:53). This is one of the reasons why an average Yoruba man or woman wants to live up to an old age.[14]

Ọbalùfọ̀n, the divinity considered as the inventor of weaving and clothing, (McKenzie 1976b:201) is said to be responsible for the provision of children for barren women, and on the subject of longevity, he is believed to have said:

The knowledge and observation
Of prescribed prohibitions,
Makes a person attain old age
The knowledge and observation
Of prescribed general laws
Makes a person live
For a long number of years
A person should abstain
From breaking general laws
So as not to die at a tender age
This is a warning from Ọbalùfọ̀n divinity
The-owner-of-the-world-can-identify-a-gift
The-strong-man-who-knows-Ogun
The-man-who-was-so-old-that-
He-became-a-statue-of-iron.[15]

The gist of the above translation is that for a man to attain old age, he should seek to know the general laws relevant to his existence and strive to observe them. If he breaks any of them he would die at a tender age.[16] If he observes them, he will live for a long number of years; that is, he will attain old age.

For the Yoruba, there are two sets of general laws which they observe. The first is the set of general laws specified and observed by everyone in the community,[17] while the second is the set of general laws specified and observed by members of a lineage, a family, certain professions, a cult group or the worshippers of a particular divinity.[18]

It is the responsibility of a person to find out the relevant general laws prescribed for his compound or immediate family from the male head of the compound or from the head of the family. No laws must be broken on the pretext of having no knowledge of it. Every person knows these laws from childhood. The same repercussion awaits a person who either breaks the laws because he claims to have no knowledge of them, or breaks the laws deliberately: he dies at the prime age of his life.

At the same time, the Yoruba also say that a man is not harmed or killed by breaking a law which he has no knowledge of. But when a person is seriously sick, or if he has rashes all over his mouth, the Yoruba sometimes think that he might have mistakenly eaten a forbidden food or that he has not observed a certain law of which he was not aware. His action is therefore seen as not having been deliberate. But at the same time, the illness is attributed to the non-observance of the general laws. Hence, a few cases of death may sometimes be attributed to this.

Before the advent of modern education, there was a rigorous observance of the various taboos by the generality of the people. Western education, together with its attendant urbanisation and industrialisation have reshaped the attitude of most Yoruba people on the subject. The educated ones now consider religious laws as superstitious beliefs and currently make little or no effort to observe them.[19]

A number of those who really want to observe them are described by the youths as being conservative. The parents cannot enforce the observance of these laws all the time as the influence of the peer groups appear to

outweigh their own. Consequently, common interests and social values are neglected in the society.

At the same time, there has been a number of deaths of the young and middle-aged in the society; usually through accidents, sickness *etc.* The explanation of the old about this is that a lot of the former eat *eewo*, forbidden food and break other laws with dire consequences. (Awolalu 1970:28). They recall the "good old days" when all the laws were observed and people lived until they become old.[20]

Since we have seen that the non-observance of general laws can shorten a person's life and cause his death, we shall now examine the other causes of death.

Causes of Death

The Yoruba believe that each person chooses his destiny in heaven before coming into the world. In fact, it is said to be chosen while the individual kneels down. Hence, it is called *àkúnlẹ̀yàn* - "that which was chosen while kneeling down". (Abimbola 1976:113). Once a person chooses his destiny, it is fixed and cannot be changed by that person again. (Bascom 1951c:492). This explains the reason why the Yoruba say that "the destiny which we chose in heaven is the exact one which we meet when we

arrive on earth". (Idowu 1962:175). If a man chooses a good destiny, everything will be good for him on earth and if a man chooses a bad destiny, things would really go bad for him on earth.(Bascom 1951c:492 and Abimbola 1976:118).

Although sacrifices and offerings can help a man, the destiny cannot be changed. It is fixed. So, if a man has been destined to die at the age of thirty, he would definitely die at this age and a man destined to live for a hundred years would also attain that age. Thus, all the things which happens to a man from birth to death can be traced directly to his destiny which he chose before coming into the world. No one knows the type of destiny which he chose unless he consults a *babaláwo* who would then reveal it to him. (Abimbola 1976:147).

We see therefore that though the cause of death of a person can be traced to either an accident or some other thing, the point still remains that it has been a part of the person's destiny to die at that time and in such circumstances. This then is the first major cause of death: a person dies when he is destined to do so, irrespective of his age.

The second cause of death among the Yoruba is ill-will from others.[21](Maclean 1974:32). The Yoruba call

this *ayé* or *ọmọ aráyé*,[22] which means "the people of the world". It can range from sorcery to witchcraft.

Although the Yoruba believe that the destiny of a man is fixed, we are nevertheless confronted with the fear of the Yoruba about those who can change their destiny.

It is widely believed that a person can be harmed and even killed by sorcery which the Yoruba call *ìsàsí*, meaning "that which is sent after someone" - in this instance, the thing sent after someone is usually evil medicine. (Leighton *et al*, 1963:38,113). It is also known as *àránsí*, which means "the thing sent to someone as you send a message".

There are various forms of evil medicine which can harm or kill. As we have ordinary medicine prepared from herbs, roots and animals; so also do we have medicines which use only sacred words to make things happen. This form of incantations is known as *àyájọ́* in Ile-Ifẹ. (Fabunmi 1972; 1985:101-105). Because the Yoruba believe that at creation, everything including plants, animals, objects and even humans all have different secret names with which they are called. (Prince 1960:67).

To kill any plant, animal, or human, all a person has to do is to recite this name and command the thing to

die. It is believed that it would immediately die.[23] These names are closely guarded secrets and only a few powerful men know them. Sorcerers can thus kill a person with the secret names of the human.[24] A lot of death is attributed to this in Yorubaland.

Sorcerers (*olóogùn ìkà*) are also believed to send Sigidi, (an object made of clay but whose spirit can travel a long distance) to an enemy. The Ṣìgìdì is believed to appear to the person and hit him with a club or give a certain poison to him. This too may cause illness, or death.[25]

Powerful sorcerers are also believed to be capable of spiritually calling a person with medicine during sleep from a long distance, if the victim answers the call, he would die after a brief illness. This type of medicine is called *àpèta* or *àpèpa*,[26] which literally means "the call to death". Another variant may be used; this is described in Farrow (1926:119).

Another type of medicine used to kill a person indirectly among the Yoruba is called *èdì*, which literally means "tying up a man". When this medicine is used against a person, the victim loses all his sense of reasoning completely; he is then told in a psychic manner, what he should do. He may be instructed to kill

his wife and children or may be told to resign his job; he may even be told to commit suicide. This is recognized throughout Yorubaland as a cause of death. If a person is suspected of sorcery, people avoid him in the locality.

The Yoruba believe that some people are entirely dependent on the use of *àṣẹ* to harm and kill others. The literal meaning of *ase* is "may it be so". The intention of the user is thus similar to that of the christian who says "amen". But the basic difference is that the Yoruba *ase* is an object made of black soap, herbs, roots, parts of animals, and other medicinal recipes mixed up together and put into a ram's horn. It is used to make things happen immediately. Thus, if a man uses it to command a tree to shed its leaf, it would do so. Similarly, it can be used to make a man run amock or kill instantly. What the sorcerer has to do is touch the *ase* to do certain things to a person. The Yoruba believe that it works and that it is a very lethal piece of medicine.[27]

The *ase* is almost always used to inflict a curse (*èpè*) on a person.[28] Although a person can be cursed without the use of an *àṣẹ*, the belief is that the *ase* makes the curse much more efficacious. (Ọlajubu and Ojo 1977:261).[29] In doing this, the forces are negatively invoked, for, as Drewal and Drewal (1990:50) put it,

"..the destruction..of an enemy". But as the Drewals and Abraham (1958:161) state, curses have their limitations: "An undeserved curse cannot take effect, and in fact, may return upon the curser". Curses may hence cause the death of a cursed person,[30] or on the other hand, of the curser himself. It is thus seen as a two-edged sword.

Witchcraft is also believed to be another cause of death among the Yoruba. (Morton-Williams 1960a:35).[31] There are two main practitioners of witchcraft - men who are called wizards (*ọ̀ṣó*) and the women who are referred to as witches (*àjẹ́*). Professor Morton-Williams affirms the Yoruba thought that older women are more likely to be witches. (1960a:38). But the modern view is that witchcraft is practised both by the young and the old. Witches only rely on their highly developed will-power which they use to harm, maim and kill. (Prince 1961:798; Abimbola 1976:152). In an Ifa verse from *Èjì Ogbè*, witches are seen as those who kill whether they are offended or not.[32] Even if a person is offended by a witch, and the witch is ready to harm or kill, it is difficult to know through the actions or behaviour of the witch. (Drewal and Drewal 1983:75).[33]

Old age is obviously a major cause of death. The Yoruba generally accept that when a person becomes very

old, he may die at any time, either after a short illness or even without falling sick at all. The death of the old does not attract any suspicion of sorcery or witchcraft as its cause. Everyone agrees that the life span of the old has been completed and he is ripe for death. (Awolalu 1980:26).

The Yoruba also say that disobedience (*àìgbọ́ran*) and "deliberate misbehaviour" (*àfọwọ́fà*) are causes of death. When a person has been advised against taking a particular course of action, if he disobeys and rejects good advice, he may come to a serious harm or even die as a result. Disobedience is seen by the Yoruba not only as a source of eventual death but also as a source of misfortune and other troubles. The meaning of *àfọwọ́fà* is self-caused trouble. A person who sleeps with another person's wife and dies through the traditional poison (*mágùn*)[34] on the woman is deemed to have died by his own deliberate misbehaviour. The death is thus seen as being self-inflicted.

Among the Yoruba, *ojúkòkòrò* (covetousness) is seen as a cause of death. When a person is not satisfied with his possessions, if he goes to steal, he might be killed in the process. The Yoruba say of such a person - "he is a greedy person". *Ojúkòkòrò* is formed from the words *ojú*

which means "face" or "eye" and *kòkòrò* which means an "insect". It is assumed that it is the invasion of the face or the eye by an insect which has deluded the person and has made him into a person who is not satisfied by his possession. He now wants to have so many wives and lovers and lots of riches.

Such a person may eventually contact an herbalist who may prepare a special money-making medicine for him. With the use of this medicine, he will be able to get rich quickly. The only repercussion is the belief that this type of medicine shortens a person's life in return for a large sum of money. Sometimes the person does not use his own life span but uses that of one of his children.

The amount of money demanded is believed to be commensurate with the length of time which the person has "donated" from his life span. For example, if a person wants a million *naira*,[35] he may donate most of his life span and opt to live for only ten years. He becomes wealthy immediately and lives for only ten years afterwards. Spirits are believed to be the agents who usually bring the money to such people. Stories like this are common all over Yorubaland.[36] A lot of people are still believed to practise this in Yorubaland and when a

rich man suddenly dies, there are unconfirmed rumours that he had used such medicine, had reduced his life span, hence his sudden death. (Prince 1960:65-66).

This belief is used by the Yoruba to explain sudden deaths of very wealthy people in the community. The wealthy possess the resources with which to pay for the services of top medical doctors, herbalists and *Ifa* priests, yet they died. An explanation for their deaths should then lie elsewhere: in their use of money-making medicines. It also explains how they suddenly became rich.

Oath-taking is also believed to kill a particular person or groups of people who swear falsely to an oath when there is a disagreement within the family or the lineage. A person must thus not swear falsely.[37] To do otherwise is seen as a possible cause of death. (Bascom 1969a:553 & 1969b:37). When the death of such person takes place, it is often said that "*alájọbí* has killed him", which means that he has been killed because of his unfaithfulness to the kin group *(alájọbí)*.

Àbíkú is "any child who dies and is reborn several times into the same family; hence the life-span of an *àbíkú* is characteristically very short". (Mọbọlade 1973:62). They are children from the "spirit" world

(Beier 1958:329), who got into their mothers' wombs, replacing the babies there; sometimes they even replace the soul of a newly-born child.[38] (McClelland 1982:31). While in the past, *àbíkú* children may afflict parents and die only to come back to the parents to be reborn in successive births,[39] hence they are referred to as *àbíkú*, "children born to die".[40] The incidence has declined considerably in modern times. (Mobọlade 1973:63-4). The infant mortality rate is now low. Most of the parents who were reputed to have had the misfortune of bearing *àbíkú* children informed me that a large number of such children which they lost in the 1950s and the 60s died from *sẹnu kótó*,[41] "that which locks up the mouth and makes it open only partially". I found out that this was lockjaw, also known as tetanus. This is not to say that they did not believe in the existence of the *àbíkú*. They did but also had another form of explanation for the deaths because *àbíkú* children are believed to die usually through suffering from one ailment or another.

Deaths of some teenagers and sometimes older people have in recent times been attributed to the incidence of their being *emèrè*. Abraham (1958:159) defines *emèrè* as "person reborn and having the power to consult with spirits". Spirits in this sense, mean the spirits of

similar children who are believed to roam about the world and also inhabit the spirit world (Beier 1954:330). These *emèrè* are also *àbíkú* of some sort, who do not die in infancy, but are reborn, grow up into teenagers or beyond, and sometimes get married.[42] It is believed that they would only spend an exact number of years on earth and die on certain significant days chosen by them.[43] Some are believed to choose the day of their marriage; for others, it is the time shortly after then and for others still, after the birth of their first child.[44] Thus, when a young man or woman dies, the cause is sometimes attributed to the probability that he/she might have been an *emèrè*.

Finally, the neglect of the divinity *(ẹbọra)* worshipped in a person's lineage or family may be the cause of misfortune[45] and death. When a divinity is not appeased with sacrifices, he may afflict the person or members of the lineage with illness and death. This may continue in the lineage until the appropriate sacrifices are offered periodically to the divinity.

We see that the causes of death among the Yoruba are many: sorcery, witchcraft, old age, disobedience, deliberate misbehaviour, covetousness, spirits in children (*àbíkú*), spirits in children and adults (*emèrè*),

neglected family divinities and the non-observance of relevant general laws.

We shall now look at the different ways by which a person attempts to prevent his impending death, or, in other words, the ways in which the day of death could be postponed.

PREVENTING DEATH:

Although the Yoruba believe that the day of one's death is fixed, it is also ironically believed that certain things could be done to prevent one's death or postpone the day of death.[46] The old people are reputed to know these ways but are reluctant to use them because of what they believe to be the side-effects. It is possible, they say, to prevent death by using one of the processes outlined below, but the death so prevented by the very old may be transferred to one of his offsprings. To avoid this, they do not use the methods all the time they suspect the approach of death.

The first way of preventing death is to appease Death and to plead with him. It is believed that he would leave the person alone until another time. An example of the use of this method can be found in the *Ifá* corpus, in the verse known as *Ọ̀yẹ̀kú Méjì*.[47]

In the verse, there was a fight between Iku's mother and some people at *Èjìmẹ̀kùn Karà* market. In the ensuing fight, Iku's mother was killed. In revenge, Ikú, (Death) killed four hundred people. Ọrunmila (*Ifa divinity*) had to beg and appease him before he stopped further killings.

The second method of preventing death is by offering an appropriate sacrifice after a course of divination at the diviner's. Through this sacrifice, death can be persuaded to leave the person alone. This is still widely used in Yorubaland. An example can be found in the *Ifa* corpus, in the verse known as *Ìrosùn Mọgba* (also known as *Èturúpọ̀n*).[48] The story is as follows.

At Èkìtì-Ẹ̀fọ̀n, there were successive deaths of the old and the young. The people consulted some *Ifa* priests who divined for them. The clients were asked to offer sacrifice with dogs, goats and certain herbs. They did and it was with this that Orunmila helped them to beg and appease Death who immediately stopped further killings. Those who were sick and were at the point of death also became well and healthy again, their death having been prevented by sacrifice described in the verse. Among the Yoruba, sacrifices are still being offered not only to

prevent death but also to avert misfortune and ward off evil.[49]

Death could also be prevented by making him procastinate and indefinitely postpone an activity. The Yoruba express it as *fòní dòní, fọ̀la dọ́la*. This means "fixing a date today, changing it tomorrow". To make Death behave in this way, a handful of sign/pattern of the *Ifa* verse called *Ọ̀bàrà Méjì*[50] is drawn on sand spread on any surface. The following incantations (*ọfọ̀*) from the same verse are recited on the sand:[51]

Pìkí pìkí lọta inú omi í yí,
Pìkí pìkí ni ilẹ̀ í mì,
Ikú ì í yí,
Kó́ pọta inú omi,
Ìdágìrì ẹsẹ̀ kìí pọ̀nà,
Bí Ikú bá múra dèmí,
Ọ̀la náa ni,
Ọ̀la ni tọ̀nà,
Ọ̀la náà ni,
Ọ̀la nàá roko,
Ọ̀la náà ni,
Ọ̀la nàá rodò.

Translation

Stones in a river roll on smoothly,
The earth shakes vigorously during earth tremors,
Death does not roll,
And kill the stones in a stream.
The road does not die,
Because too many feet walk on it,
If death gets ready to kill me,
He will have to procastinate,
It will be tomorrow,
Tomorrow is the day for the road,
It will be tomorrow,
Tomorrow is the day for the farm,
It will be tomorrow,
Tomorrow is the day for the stream.

From the sand, a small bit is swallowed and the rest is poured on the head by the person. Death then becomes powerless over the person as he (Death) would continue to promise to visit the person day after day, on an indefinite basis. This means that the visit would be put off indefinitely. Because this method does not cost any amount of money, it is practised more often than the first two.

An effective method of preventing death is by the use of relevant incantations alone. There are about three types of incantations. They are *ọfọ̀, àyájọ́* and *ògèdè*. An example[52] of an incantation *(ọfọ̀)* which can be used to prevent death by a regular traveller is as follows:

Ikú kò gbowó,
Ọ̀run kò kọ ìṣègùn,
Ikú pọmọ Olówó kánri,
Ó pa Gìdí, ọmọ abòrìṣà,
Ó pa Ọ̀tákòmílá, ọmọ owó bíbọ pọ́nlá,
Ó pa Ẹ̀gbèjí, olóògùn ọjà,
Ó pa Àràọ̀nì, abèṣù kìtìpà,
Ó pa ẹnití kìí kú,
Ó pa Àràbà pàtàkì,
Tíí sọlọ́jà Awo,
Àgò nìkàn n'Ikú pa,
Èmi ọmọ Àgò ló nbọ̀ lọ́nà,
Bíkú nbẹ lórèéré, Àgò yà,
Ọmọ Àgò ló nlọ, Àgò yà,
Ikú yà kò mí,
Àrùn yà kò mí,
Èmi ọmọ Àgò ló nlọ.

Translation.

Death does not accept money,
Heaven does not reject medical care,
Death killed the child of a very wealthy person,
He killed Gìdí, the child of one,
Who worships a divinity,
He killed Ọ̀tákọ̀míla, the child of he,
Who licks his fingers at dinner.
Death killed Ẹ̀gbẹ̀jí, the market medicine-man,
He killed À̀ràrọ̀nì, the owner of a giant Èṣù,
He killed he who should not have died,
He killed the important Àràbà,
Who was the head of the Ifá Cult.
Àgò was the only one killed by Death,
I, the child of Àgò is approaching,
If Death is in the vicinity,
Àgò, clear out of the way,
The child of Àgò is approaching,
Àgò, clear out of the way,
The child of Àgò is approaching,
Àgò, clear out of the way,
Death, clear out of the way,
Disease, clear out of my way,
I, the child of Àgò is approaching.

This incantation (*ọfọ̀*) is used by regular travellers such as long-distance traders, to prevent death which can kill on the roads, *ikú àtọ̀nàpa*, literally, "the death which kills on the ways/road".

By consulting a *babalawo* who would perform divination for him, a person can know the necessary things to do, apart from sacrifices, to prevent death.[53] Those who consult diviners to avert death first have to offer sacrifices before being asked to do these type of things. Death is thereby prevented in this way.

Yoruba people also strive to prevent death by consulting *Aladura* prophets. (Awolalu 1970:33-34). The *Aladura* believe that all prayers are answered by God. (Peel 1968:119). Those who have *spiritual power*[54] will not be harmed by sorcery or witchcraft. The *Aladura* thus pray to God for spiritual power with which to confront their enemies. In so doing, they depend totally on the use of prayers. (Ọmọyajowo 1982:154, 155-156).[55] In Ile-Ifẹ, the Christ Apostolic Church discourage members from using candles and incense but members use sacred words and attend Church services with bottles of water. There is also the Friday night vigil devoted to prayers; fasts

are also prescribed for members regularly by the prophets and pastors.

Two further ways which the Yoruba use to try to prevent their deaths are: joining secret societies (Awolalu 1970:33) and consulting Muslim spiritualists. There are many secret societies in Yorubaland; the most prominent of which is the Reformed Ògbóni Fraternity (R.O.F). People join the society so as to derive some protection there against sorcery, witchcraft, unemployment and court cases. Members also get substantial help from other influential members.[56]

Muslim spiritualists (known as *aláàfáà* in Yorubaland) produce medicinal preparations for people to wash with; rub the body with or ingest. These medicines are believed to be effective in protecting users against sorcery and witchcraft. (Peel 1968:136; Awolalu 1970:34).

The Yoruba still consult the *babaláwo* when they feel that their property and life are at stake, but they are aware that these kinds of prevention are not always effective. For the Yoruba realize that when the time of death is near, nothing could be done to postpone it. (Ogunniran 1973:23; Abimbọla 1973b:62; Ajuwọn 1989:191). Hence they say "we can cure the sick of their sickness, but we cannot cure death".

Summary:

The Yoruba classify death according to the different ways or manner in which death came to the affected person. The age at which death came to a man also determines how the death is classified. The death is good if the deceased was old and survived by children. It is accepted that the death of the old is natural; the person has completed the span of life allotted by God.

It is the belief of the Yoruba that the eating of forbidden food by members of a lineage and the breaking of other taboos open them to the likelihood of dying young. Hence, efforts are made to observe religious laws.

A person is believed to die at a particular time because it is part of his chosen destiny to die at that time. Others causes of death include ill-will from others, sorcery, curses, witchcraft, disobedience, covetousness and old age.

Great time and effort are devoted to preventing or postponing the day of death by the Yoruba. These include: appeasing Death and pleading with him; the offering of appropriate sacrifices; making Death procastinate and indefinitely postpone an activity; the use of relevant incantations and by divination. But the Yoruba realize

that all these methods may not be effective if and when Death is ready to strike. We shall discuss the general practice of burial rites in Ile-Ifẹ in the next Chapter.

Endnotes:

1. Chief M.A. Fabunmi, Personal communication, 2nd July, 1989 at Ile-Ifẹ.

2. Professor Abimbọla (1973a:59) describes efforts to improve "chosen bad destinies" as "endless, albeit fruitless struggle to achieve the impossible". See also Abimbọla (1976:145-7). The solution suggested by Horton (1961:113) is thus not effective, because if followed, it will help modify one's destiny in only a very minimal manner. To do this, the individual has to make regular sacrifices to his head, *ori*. (Idowu 1962:172; Abimbọla 1976:114 and Lawal 1985:92). Another method is for the person to have *awure* medicine made for him. Buckley (1985b:236) defines *awure* as "those medicines which are intended to bring" a person "popularity, prestige and wealth". But as Buckley further notes, "any radical change is of major significance to him, and it can be dangerous" (p. 237). Buckley goes on : ..these are dangerous for they elicit the help of powerful agencies", (p.242). Two examples of such danger given by Buckley are

: the medicine can shorten the life of the person (p.244) and "the medicine can work badly and the person will die after three years *because their destiny is not with them*". (p.244), (my emphasis). Hence, a lot of people prefer to leave their destinies as they are.

[3]. Chief M.O. Fashọgbọn, Personal communication, 2nd August 1989.

[4]. Drewal & Drewal 1990:49; Awolalu 1970:34. For death to be classified as "good", it should be "peaceful and timely" (Abiọdun 1976:5), hence the emphasis on manner of death and age.

[5]. For a stimulating classification of death into two broad categories, see (Ọlatunji 1975:69-72).

[6]. Chief Odutọla Anifalaje, Ifa priest, Personal communication at Ibadan on 20th July, 1989.

[7]. Painful deaths like this, particularly through accidents, do not determine the state of a person in the afterlife. But in Murelaga, it is a sign that the person will be condemned in the afterlife. (Douglass 1969:22).

[8]. Drewal & Drewal 1990:138.

[9]. Children are useful to farmers in an agricultural society because they help on the farms. At Ile-Ifẹ, for example, a large number of farmers' children travel to

their fathers' respective farming villages around Ile-Ifẹ every Friday afternoon, after school. They stay on the farms with their parents until Sunday evening or Monday morning when they return to Ile-Ifẹ to resume their schooling. See also Aronson (1978:154) and Peel (1983:120-121).

[10]. Drewal & Drewal 1983:80 & 120. See also Abimbọla 1976:160-161 and Kayọde 1986:54; Morton-Williams 1956:329; Leighton *et al* 1963:39 and Aronson 1978:136.

[11]. These sayings were collected from various informants at Ile-Ifẹ between 2nd and 22nd August, 1990. See also Awoniyi (1975:367-8) for a similar collection.

[12]. Chief K.E. Ajayi, Personal communication, 2nd September 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ. This is also implied in one of the songs in Parrinder (1972:44).

[13]. Daramola & Jeje 1967:152 and Morton-Williams, *op cit.*

[14]. Medicines are sometimes prepared to achieve this end. (McClelland 1982:113).

[15]. Source: Chief M.O. Fashọgbọn, Personal communication at Ile-Ifẹ on 12th July, 1989.

[16]. For brief notes on the consequences of non-observance, see Bascom 1969a:117 and McKenzie 1982:14.

[17]. Awolalu 1970:28; 1973:31.

[18]. Awolalu, *ibid.*

[19]. On the "erosion of older communities" and the loss of "all universal relevance", see Clarke and Linden (1984:93).

[20]. Chief M.O. Fashọgbọn, Personal communication, 12th July, 1989 at Ile-Ifẹ.

[21]. Bascom calls this "supernatural causes". (1969a:73). The Yoruba do not believe that bad occurrences happen by chance. (Sodipo 1973:19). The Nyoro too do not hold the view that death may come to a person "by chance". (Beattie 1961:171).

[22]. Barber (1991:337) gives the meaning as "ill-disposed people" but Margaret Drewal adds that they are "troublemakers who cause harm and hardship to people because of jealousy". (1992:204).

[23]. Prince, *ibid.*

[24]. On the causes of death through sorcery, see Morton-Williams 1960a:36.

[25]. The Ṣigidi has been described by Professor Morton-Williams as "the manifestation of an impending death". (*ibid*). See also Prince 1960:70.

[26]. Buckley 1985b:62.

[27]. Buckley 1985b:142. He also notes that it is also used for "good purposes": *e.g.*, for "prayer" or "to stop the flow of blood after an accident". (p.144).

28. Maclean 1974:142; Buckley 1985b:141-4; Pemberton 1989:124.

29. *Àṣẹ* is believed to belong to Èṣù. (Pelton 1980:147). It is the object which he uses to achieve his tasks. (Abimbọla 1976:187). There is also a similar belief in Murelaga that a few people possess the power to kill others with curses. (Douglass 1969:20).

30. Prince 1960:71-2.

31. See also Evans-Pritchard for a similar belief by the Azande. (1937:63-83). The Yoruba belıef is strengthened by the confession of some witches. (Awolalu 1973:29). Yoruba witchcraft is thus similar to that of the Effutu of Southern Ghana as they are both "introspective". (Wyllie 1973:74).

32. For a general view of witches and their craft, see Morton-Williams (1956:315-334); Ray (1976:136); McClelland (1982:29); Drewal & Drewal (1983:41, 65, 73ff); Beier (1958:6); Abimbola (1976:165-169; 174-186), (1977:118-119,166); and Bascom (1969a:176-177); Hallen & Ṣodipọ 1986; Hoch-Smith (1978:249-252) and Parrinder (1970).

33. Hallen & Ṣodipọ (1986:115 & 117) define *aje* as "an attribute of the person rather than as a type of special person", and that "*àjẹ́* may be a good person,

intentionally benevolent, using their extraordinary talents for the benefit of mankind". See also Beier 1958:6. For Daramọla and Jeje (1967:156), only one out of every hundred witches may be good, benevolent ones. But Morton-Williams explains Yoruba witchcraft beliefs as "the cultural expression of the psychological impact on the individuals in Yoruba society, of the social relations generated by the Yoruba pattern of marriage.." (1956:330).

[34]. *Mágùn* is a medicine which when put on a woman by the husband acts as a trap by killing the woman's lover after a sexual act. (Maclean 1974:94). It is usually put on a promiscuous woman.

[35]. Nigerian unit of currency.

[36]. We see a story of this type, about a man named Kòtẹ́milọ́rùn in Fagunwa's novel Igbo Olodumare. (1961:108-130).

[37]. This may also be classified among the general rules observed by members of the lineage.

[38]. This type of child is known as *Ogbanje* among the Igbos of South-Eastern Nigeria. (Uchendu 1965:102).

[39]. For the discussion of the *àbíkú* phenomenon, see Awolalu 1980:68; Doi 1984:128-131; Lawal 1977:51; Morton-Williams 1960a:35; Bascom 1969a:116; Johnson 1921:137;

Leighton *et al* 1963:32-33 & 36; Farrow 1926:84; Parrinder 1969:86; 1972:52 & 159; Beier 1954:330; McClelland 1982:31 and Alison Izzett 1955:28.

[40]. McClelland, *ibid.*

[41]. Informant: Mr. Bọboye Ádegoke, July 4, 1989 at Ile-Ife.

[42]. In the last twelve years, the word *emèrè* has attained an additional meaning. In the Independent African Churches such as the Christ Apostolic Church (C.A.C), men or women, no matter their age are usually pronounced as *emèrè* in visions. Females in this category outnumber males by a ratio of about ten to one. They are believed to possess destructive powers like the witches.

[43]. Mobọlade, p. 62.

[44]. But why choose these times? The belief is that they are wicked people who have no mercies; they thus want to punish their parents and spouses with their deaths. Hence, they have chosen these times when their parents' hopes on them are high. They are good occasions for dashing such hopes!.

[45]. Abimbọla 1976:157-160.

[46]. About this Yoruba practice, Morton-Williams notes that "..Death can, of couse befall one at any age, and the Yoruba are constantly on guard against it, using

magical and religious means to help in escaping it". (1960a:34). See also Maclean 1974:94-5.

47. This verse was recited for me by Chief 'Tunji Adeyẹfa on the 27th August 1990.

48. This verse was also recited for me on the 27th August 1990 at Ile-Ife by Chief 'Tunji Adeyẹfa.

49. The Yoruba believe that sacrifices can also be offered to "the mothers" (witches) so that they can allow people to live. (Drewal & Drewal 1990:18).

50. Verse also from Chief 'Tunji Adeyẹfa on 30th August 1990.

51. Maclean clarifies the purpose of such incantations (*ofo*) in Yoruba medicine: "Until the requisite incantation has been pronounced, the plant or animal part or any other ingredient of a mixture is dormant, awaiting the call to action by the words which will define its purpose and direct its action". (1974:83). See also Buckley 1985b:144-146.

52. This *ọfọ̀* was recited for me by the diviner, Chief 'Tunji Adeyẹfa on August 10, 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ.

53. For examples of these methods, see Abimbọla 1976:160 and 173. See also Drewal & Drewal 1990:137.

54. See Peel 1968:135-143 for the concept of spiritual power.

[55]. Ọmọyajowo notes that they also use "sacred words, fasts, candles, incense and water" to make sure that their prayers are efficacious. (1982:156-158).

[56]. Chief K.E. Ajayi, a leader of the R.O.F.; Personal communication, 20th July, 1989 at Ile-Ifẹ.

CHAPTER 4.

THE GENERAL PRACTICE OF BURIAL RITES IN ILE-IFẸ.

In this chapter, the following issues will be discussed: the general perspective of burial rites in Ile-Ifẹ; the belief about the origin of burial rites; an overview of the different types of burials and the problems of practice; and finally, the role of the *ìsọ̀gán* society in burials.

Among the Yoruba, the funeral is known as *isinku.* (Abraham 1958:590-591). The necessary burial rites and funerals are celebrated to aid the journey of the dead into the afterlife. If the necessary rites are not performed, the soul of the deceased lingers around the house. There is the thus the need to perform the rites and to do so correctly. (Mitchell 1977:35).[1]

Another consequence is that the ghost of the dead may also be seen frequently in the house and in the neighbourhood, sending cold shivers down people's spines. If this happens, the dead then becomes "a haunting ghost". (Parrinder 1972:51).[2] When the dead becomes a ghost who visits his or her house, the children of the deceased and those in the neighbourhood become afraid of the dead. This explains the reason why sympathizers pray

for the children of the deceased shortly after burial that their "father would not frighten them".[3]

Furthermore, if the deceased is not accorded a decent burial, he may cause the death of many other people in the lineage. (Bascom 1969a:428-433).

The burial rites, and their celebrations are thus very important, for they ease the passage of the dead to the afterlife and thus give the dead the opportunity to leave the neighbourhood. (Lawal 1977:54).[4]

But what was the origin of the celebration of funeral rites? In the *Ifa* corpus, it was mentioned in the verse known as *Ògúndárosùn*[5] that when one's parent dies, one must remember him/her and bid farewell by performing the necessary burial and funeral rites. The story is as follows. After a session of divination, *Orò* (the bull-roarer) was requested to offer a sacrifice, he refused to do so. He thought his powerful knife would not allow any evil to befall him. *Èṣù* was happy about this and he promised to make sure that *Orò* was punished for that.

On a "male" day, specifically on a Friday night, there was a gale. It swept *Orò* away, with *Orò* dropping his powerful knife on the ground. The next day, his followers and children tried to contact him and call him back, all to no avail. They bought a ram, invited people,

offered them food and drinks and celebrated the funeral. It is believed that this was how people started celebrating the funeral of their parents in Yorubaland.

The gale came from heaven and carried *Òrò* to heaven; it was mentioned in the text as *ọ̀rùn*. Hence, the disappearance of *Òrò* was equated with death. That was why his funeral was celebrated by his children. From that time, as soon as one's parent dies, one has to celebrate the funeral. This story is used by *Ifá* priests to explain how funerals came to be celebrated.

The attitude of the Yoruba towards death will be discussed from two angles: the attitude of the Yoruba to his own death; and to the death of others.

When people think about their impending death, they are baffled and find it difficult to accept the fact that everyone has to die at one time or another. The Yoruba poet, Ọlanrewaju Adepọju says in his 1975 poem: "..when I remember that death is unavoidable, I become nervous". The Yoruba thus feel nervous and worried when they think about their own death. Because they know that death is a fact of life which would come sooner or later, they become resigned to the situation. The thought of death is itself painful: that a person would leave his family, relatives, friends, home and town of birth. But the

Yoruba calmly accept the inevitable.[6] They say "we are all indebted to death".[7] The debt is the breath which he has been commissioned to retrieve from man.

Although death is seen as a necessary end of man, it is nevertheless feared by the Yoruba. According to Morton-Williams, the Yoruba fear death and believe death can kill people of different ages. (1960a:34). The fear is increased by the knowledge of what the Yoruba actually see as the fate of the body: that "..the body will be eaten up by the earth". (Abimbọla 1973a:61). "Eaten up" here means "decompose". The body is seen here as being destined for decomposition in the soil. This is imagined as a painful ordeal for the human body. A person becomes resigned to the idea of his own death.

The attitude of people towards the death of others is firstly that of sympathy. They feel sad at the loss of a member of the lineage or even a town. For some, the deceased had been a breadwinner and for others, a helper in time of crisis. His death will definitely be seen as leaving a gap.

Secondly, the death of another person reflects for all and sundry, the temporary nature of our existence on earth. It may be anybody's turn tomorrow. Hence the Yoruba say that "the death which kills one's contemporary

proverbially tells one that it may be one's turn anytime".

Thirdly, a person might be bad when alive, but at his death, even his adversaries refrain from openly making jest of him.[8] For, as the Yoruba say, a person should not gloat over the death of another. In Abimbọla's poem (1973a:59,60), he says "..Do not gloat over the death of my relative. There is no one who would not die". Another way of saying this is that: "there is no one whose father's farm would not become overgrown with weeds". A farm, (particularly a cocoa farm), becomes overgrown with weeds, even if temporarily, only when the owner dies and there is no one to do the necessary replanting.[9] The reference in the poem is to the death of everybody's fathers. Death is seen here as a thing which can rotate from one person to another, and which one must not gloat over another. Sympathizers may therefore cry and wail at the death of another person to express their feeling and to share in the sorrow of the bereaved.

<u>The Different Types of Burials:</u>

Following the lead of Van Gennep (1960:146-165), we can assert that there are three main phases in Yoruba eschatology: "separation, transformation and

incorporation".[10] Burial rites discussed in this thesis are essentially those that fall into these three stages. These rites separate the soul of the deceased from the family. (Rattray 1954:190 and Ray 1976:143). It also gives the family the assurance that they will be protected by the deceased, especially when he has become powerful with the enormous powers acquired at death. We need to add that the belief in the afterlife and the rites help the living to readjust to the situation. (Goody 1962:377-378).

In Ile-Ife, there are many types of burials, each burial corresponds with the kind of death which kills the victim. (Awolalu 1979:55; M.T. Drewal 1992:38). For this purpose, burials in Ile-Ifẹ can be broadly classified into two: those which need the attention of traditional religious priests of the divinities and members of their different cults; and those which do not.

When a person dies, and the death is not considered as being natural; especially when the death takes place through an unusual means like suicide, or through the intervention of some outside forces like lightning or falling wall, the appropriate ritual priest and members of the cults have to be invited for the burial. The

relatives of the dead cannot bury the dead for two reasons.

Firstly, such bodies are considered to be polluting and efforts to touch it by members of the family is thought to result in serious calamities such as epidemics in the family. Secondly, it is generally believed that if the body is buried by members of the family without inviting the ritual priests, such deaths would continue in the family.

The present Ọbadio, (priest of Oduduwa), who is responsible for burying the victims of a falling wall, informed me that if he is not invited when a falling wall kills a person, terrible things may happen in the victim's household. He gave an example of an instance when a man was killed by a falling wall. A wealthy man from the family of the deceased paid a visit to him (the priest), to inform him that although the death has taken place, they would not need the attention of the priest and members of the cult, and that they would rather bury the dead themselves. He was reported to have given a gift of one *naira* to the priest. The family buried the dead themselves but the wealthy man died three days later. His death was seen as a direct result of the contact with the polluted body and as a repercussion for not inviting the

priest who would have prevented such a bad occurrence. The priest was invited after this incident to perform the rites he should have performed in the first instance. The tide of evil then stopped in the family.[11]

For families who perform such rites themselves, apart from the possibility of falling walls killing more of their members in future, other signs of the anger of the divinity, Oduduwa, may be manifested to them. For example, if the surrounding walls and houses are built of concrete and there is no possibility of the wall ever falling down, snakes may appear there to bite the people; scorpions may bite people there indiscriminately; trees may fall in the wind and kill some of them and they may be involved in car accidents. It is to avoid all these evil things that the family of the victim always invite the appropriate ritual priest. (Bascom 1969b:66).

Although it is the responsibility of priests to make sure that the appropriate rituals are performed before and after the burial of the bodies, some of them are nevertheless apprehensive for their own safety because of the polluting state of the corpses. They make sure that no single item is negligently missed out from the list of herbs, plants, roots, oil, and animals which they normally prescribe and use for the rites. They also

ensure that all the procedures are strictly adhered to, in the performance of the rites. All relevant taboos and general laws are observed and the accompanying music and songs are rendered.

For the second group of burials, the attention of the priests of the divinities are not needed.[12] Christian priests are responsible for burying christians who die while Muslim clerics are likewise responsible for burying muslims who die. As for the adherents of the traditional religion, they are buried at death by members of the *ìsọ̀gán* society.

<u>The Problem of Practice:</u> There are rules for burying the dead as mentioned above. But in practice, the priests of the divinities do not bury all the dead for which they are responsible. One way or the other, a few escape their attention. For example, the priest of Ọbatala/Orisanla is responsible for burying pregnant women who die. But when a pregnant woman dies in hospital, especially when the pregnancy is about a month or two, it may not be apparent to the hospital staff and the people around. In other words, there may not be any visible sign of pregnancy, like a bulging tummy.

At death, the husband may decide to ask his relatives to help him bury the body. The state of pregnancy of the deceased would thus escape the attention of the priest of Obatala and members of the cult. The priest himself confirmed such isolated incidents, but he added that the consequences of the action remained: Such terrible deaths of pregnant women and other similar bad incidents may continue to take place in the family.

The *Ìsọ̀gán* Society: As soon as a death takes place in the lineage (known in Ile-Ife as a "compound"), all the able-bodied men in the lineage constitute the *isogan*. Children and the old are excluded from this group. It is the responsibility of the *ìsọ̀gán* to dig the grave, wash the body, dress it up, put it into the coffin and bury it. They also cover it with soil.[13]

The *Baálé* informs all male members as soon as a death takes place. He also sends messages to those who live in distant places like the farms, villages and other towns. The *Baálé* does his work through the *Lóógun* who is almost always a middle-aged able-bodied man. It is he who runs around and informs all males. At all times, he keeps in his house about two diggers and two spades. These are

the implements used by the *isogan* for digging the grave when any member of the lineage dies.

The *ìsọ̀gán* and all the male members of the lineage have to be fed. They receive a lot of food and drinks from the children and close relatives of the deceased shortly before the burial and after. They sit in the house of the deceased, in the house of his brothers or in the *Àkòdì* (the compound's central hall).

There are repercussions if they are not properly fed or if enough food or drinks are not presented to them. They may refuse to put the coffin (with the dead) in the grave. This "misbehaviour" of any of the children of the deceased may result in the elders in the *ìsọ̀gán* recalling past misbehaviour or deeds of the culprit.

The members of the *ìsọ̀gán* sit in the *Àkòdì* because the hall is regarded as the earthly abode of the ancestors in each lineage. All the lineages in Ile-Ifẹ have their own separate *Àkòdí*. The Akodi has two rooms at the back and a large hall in front. Food served to the *ìsọ̀gán* by the family of the deceased may be laid out in one of the rooms. There is a stump in the *Àkòdì* which represents the ancestors of the lineage. During monthly meetings of members of the compound, and at the time of

burial of the old, bits of food and libations of drinks are offered to the stump.

We shall now turn our attention to the reasons why burials are conducted by the *ìsọ̀gán* in Ile-Ifẹ today. In the *Ifa* verse[14] which we shall examine from the *Odù* called *Èturá Wòrìí (Olómùwó)*, we see how the norms of digging, washing and burying the dead were changed by the *ìsọ̀gán* in Ile-Ifẹ.

Although the *ìsọ̀gán* had been burying the dead before, it all took a new turn with Àlùmọ̀, described in the Ifá corpus as "a native of Ifẹ Oòyèlagbò", (ancient Ifẹ). He was a man who drank palm-wine all over the ancient city of Ifẹ. He consulted the *babaláwo* to see if he could ever have a befitting time. He performed the prescribed sacrifice and dramatically became wealthy. When he died, the male members of the lineage buried him and rendered some songs for him. Àlùmọ̀'s children entertained them lavishly. As from that time, these male members of the lineage not only wash the body, dress it and bury it, they also rendered the same songs at burials in Ile-Ifẹ today. Extracts from the last part of the verse is as follows:

JOORO-JÀÁRÁ-JO from ÈTÚRÁ WÒRÌÍ (OLÓMÙWÓ).

Àwọn ọmọkùnrin ilé wẹ òkú,
Wọ́n ní kí àwọn ọmọ mú owó òkú wá,
Wọ́n gbẹ́lẹ̀, wọ́n ńkọrin pé:

(1) Eyẹ ń ṣèkú oge o,
Eyẹ ń sẹ̀ o,
Òṣèrèṣẹ̀rẹ̀ (2ce).

(2) Ògòdòmèrì o,
Ògòdòmèrì o,
Owó osùn, owó àdín o,
A fi rẹmu mu.

(3) Òkú dide, dide, (2ce),
Ara òkú, ara òkú le. (2ce).

(4) Jooro-jóòró-jo Àlùmọ̀,
Joo Àlùmọ̀,
Àlùmọ̀ dúdú mọ̀ di pupa,
Joo Àlùmọ̀,
Ọmọ lóòkú ẹ kú àìsùn,
Joo Àlùmọ̀,
Ó kọ́tí kẹmu kò wá lárìsùn,
Joo Àlùmọ̀.

Translation.

The men of the lineage bathed the corpse,

They demanded some money for their services,

They dug the grave and sang the following songs:

(1) Birds flew around the corpse,
Of the trendy Àlùmọ̀, squeaking,
The birds sang around, saying:
"*Ọ̀ṣẹ̀rẹ̀ṣẹ̀rẹ̀*!", "*Ọ̀ṣẹ̀rẹ̀ṣẹ̀rẹ̀*!".

(2) Oh! *Ògòdòmèrì*!,
Oh! *Ògòdòmèrì*!,
The money for *Ọ̀ṣùn*,
The money for *àdín* oil,
We spent it on palm-wine,
Which we drank.

(3) Dead, rise up, rise!,
Dead rise up, rise!,
The dead's whole body,
The dead's whole body,
Is now very fit.

(4) *Jooro-Jóòró-jo* Àlùmọ̀,
The dark-skinned Àlùmọ̀,
Has become light-complexioned,
Joo-Àlùmọ̀,
Child of the deceased,
Greetings on the wake-keeping,
Joo Àlùmọ̀,

He gave us plenty of beer and palm-wine,

At the wake-keeping,

Joo Àlùmọ̀.

The male members (*ìsọ̀gán*) then dug the grave and buried Àlùmọ̀. This asserts how such rituals, particularly the rendering of the songs started to be performed by the *ìsọ̀gán*. They still sing these songs today at funerals. To this we will return in the discussion of burial rites of the old.

<u>The Digging of the Grave:</u>

As soon as the children of the deceased have shown the place of burial to the *Lóógun*, he is usually accompanied by all adult male members to the site. The *ìsọ̀gán* usually dig the grave either in the morning or evening. That is, either before the sun's rays become hot or at sunset. Diggers and spades are brought to the site by the *Lóógun*. A young man digs first. After some time, another young man takes over the responsibility of clearing the soil away from the trench. A lot of people including the middle-aged take turns at digging and clearing the soil on to the sides of the grave. Meanwhile, palm-wine is drunk by members of the *ìsọ̀gán*

standing or sitting around the grave. It is usually provided by the children of the deceased.

When a person comes out of the trench, he comes to drink a cup or two of palm-wine. The digging comes to an end only when the grave is some six feet deep, eight feet long and about four feet wide. The elders make sure that it is of this specification before they ask the digging to be brought to an end. This is to ensure that the dead is not accessible to pigs which roam about digging and scavenging for food.

The digging is seen as being very important. The Yoruba say: "it is those who dig the grave who actually help to keep the body away, those who wail are making mere noise". (Areje 1985:66).[15] Wailing will not bring the dead back to life, although it is an important part of the ritual. Digging the grave is a positive action which will help dispose the body.

While the digging is in process, the members of the *ìsọ̀gán* usually busy themselves with discussion of that particular death; the general phenomenon of death; cocoa trade and sundry other things. When they complete their tasks, they wash their arms, hands and feet with water provided by the children of the deceased. It is then time for them to eat and drink as much as they like, from food

and drinks freshly provided by the children and close relatives of the dead. This is only the first phase of feasting by the *ìsọ̀gán*.

The following prohibitions are usually observed by the *ìsọ̀gán*. Anyone among them who has had sexual relations with any of the wives of the deceased (if a man), should not be present at the side of the grave at the time of digging. He deliberately excuses himself on the grounds of sudden illness; for it is believed that if he goes there and steps on the laterite (*ìlẹ̀pa*) dug up from the grave, he may die within a very short period. He is also proscribed from helping to wrap up the body with shroud and from being physically present at the graveyard at the time of burial. But he is however allowed by custom to join the *ìsọ̀gán* in eating and drinking.

In recent years, the *ìsọ̀gán* have devised a new way of digging the grave. They now contribute money and hire a professional digger of graves. This is in fact a new form of occupation in Ile-Ifẹ. Instructions are given to the digger as to the specification of the grave. The *ìsọ̀gán* sit around the grave, eat and drink while watching the digger at work. Although the hired digger is responsible for digging the grave, the filling-up of the

grave with laterite after burial is the responsibility of the *isọgán* as this is a much lighter work to do. It also portrays them as those who actually bury the dead.

The children and siblings of the deceased may be present at the graveyard, they are not required to donate money for digging and are not allowed to dig the grave. They are excused from these obligations since they are the chief mourners in the lineage.

<u>The Washing of the Body:</u>

The body is usually washed in the morning or in the evening to avoid the casting of the shadows of the body and of those who wash it on the ground. This general law is rigidly observed. The shadow of the dead must not fall on the shadow of the living. There is the belief that if it does, the dead may request the pleasure of the living in heaven.[16]

A chair is placed at the back of the deceased's house (in the past, a mortar[17] used to be placed there, in an inverted position). Four or five men carry the body and place it on the chair in a sitting position. Two men make sure that they hold the head of the dead firmly lest it shakes from place to place. It is believed that if the head is not firmly held, and consequently allowed to nod

in the direction of any of the washers, the dead is indirectly informing the person that the person's own time of death is swiftly coming.[18]

Two buckets of water, pieces of Yoruba traditional soap, or a modern tablet of soap and a handful of Yoruba bath sponge, kàn-ìn-kàn, (*Luffa Cylindrica)* are the items used for the washing. When the body is put in the sitting position in the chair, one of the large gowns (*agbada*) of the deceased is wrapped around his private part. Washing usually starts from the head to the feet.

A sharp razor blade is used to shave a small part of the hair of the deceased's head. (Ellis 1894:156; Talbot 1926:475; Awolalu 1970:35). This is to help separate him from the community of the living. A very small part is shaved since the action is just symbolic.

A piece of soap is placed in the sponge. The sponge and soap is then put in the left palm of the dead. The hand is moved to its head and the deceased's hand is actually used to start the washing of its head. In other words, the deceased is helped to start the ritual of washing by moving its left hand and using it to wash the head. This is repeated twice.[19]

The sponge and soap is then removed from its hand and one of the men takes over the responsibility of

bathing the body from head to toe. (Dennett 1910:30). If the deceased is a woman, the last child is given the sponge and called upon to wash the private part. But if the deceased was a man, the last son is asked to do the same thing. If these children are not around, any of the children of the deceased is asked to do it. The last child is called upon to do this because he was the youngest child born with the sexual organ and is supposed to be the one adored most by the mother.

The body is dried with the dress wrapped around the organ, having been thoroughly washed.[20] This dress is left on the chair for seven days. The last child thereafter washes it and uses it as a quilt for covering him/herself at night. The deceased parent is believed to be able to protect the child and help him/her out of any difficulty through the use of this dress.

Shortly before the body is removed from the chair, one of the *isogan* says "*Ìgbálákùkù*". He shouts this three times. On those three occasions, the others reply by shouting "*Eruku yọ̀mùyọ̀mù*". "*Ìgbálákùkù*" here is a word which loosely means that the main task has been undertaken (washing the body) and that the period of feasting and drinking, of celebration has arrived. "*Eruku yọ̀mùyọ̀mù*" means, on its own, "lots of dust in the air".

It signifies the particles of dust which fill up the air when the children of the deceased start to dance in the hot, dry afternoon or evening. This is also a reference to the mood of feasting and dancing which dominates the funeral ceremony.

At this stage, the members of the *ìsọ̀gán* who washed the body burst into bouts of singing. Some of them lead the singing while the others join in singing the refrain. Those who did not participate in the body-washing are not excluded. One of the songs rendered is as follows:

Lead: *A gbé yèyé relé o,*
Refrain: *Àràkorẹ̀gẹ̀.*
All: *Ó di yéè,*
Ó dòkú ẹmu o,
Àràkorẹ̀gẹ̀.

Loosely translated, it means:

Lead: We are preparing mother
For her journey home.
Refrain: We are doing so in style.
All: It is now a festive occasion,
It is the burial,
To be celebrated with palm-wine,

In great style.[21]

They continue to sing this song for quite some time.[22] While singing, the body is carried into the house and put on a bed already decorated for that purpose. The body then has to be wrapped up. Those who wash the body may be exempted from this task and they may simply sit somewhere and continue drinking. Other members of the *ìsọ̀gán* may be called upon to dress up the body.

Dressing up the Body:

For a man, a set of white lace dresses which consists of the trouser, the vest (*bùbá*) and the *agbádá* (a large gown for men) is sewn and put on the deceased's body. The nostrils are filled up with cotton wool; the inside of the ear is also blocked with cotton wool. This is to prevent flies from entering through these places.

For women, a white lace dress is usually put on the body. For both sexes, the two legs are tied together at the feet with cotton wool hooks (*ìkọ́ òwú*). Socks may be put on the feet while gloves may be put on the hands. The bed is laid out with a very beautiful bedsheet. A pillow is put at the head of the bed. The room is decorated with plates, dresses, clothes and glassware. The body is

sprayed with perfumes; the room is treated with insecticides. The body is thus finally displayed so that people could see it, greet it and speak to it.

Meanwhile, other members of the *isogan* (who are joined later by those dressing the body), demand small sums of money from the children of the deceased. *They* call this money *"owó ìbọbẹ́"*, which means "the fee taken for washing the deceased's genitals". The children and siblings of the deceased are usually generous with this. The genitals is a private part. It is washed by a person him/herself and not exposed to the glare of people. The members of the *ìsọ̀gán* are always men. Whether the deceased is male or female, they (the *ìsọ̀gán*) are responsible for washing the body and are consequently privileged not only to see the body in a naked form but also to wash it. The body and especially the genitals which is supposed to be kept private is thus exposed to them. It is hence seen by them as a special job for which the children must pay a token amount of money.[23]

Having done that, the *ìsọ̀gán* start on another course of singing. They sing, clap and dance. The children and relatives of the deceased are also invited to join in the dancing. The fourth song reproduced above is rendered by the *ìsọ̀gán*. This was one of the songs rendered at the

burial of the mythological Àlùmọ̀ (reproduced earlier on in this chapter).

The time of death and burial is a period when members of the *ìsọ̀gán* are given a limited licence to say what they like. They take the chance of establishing a joking relationship with the children of the deceased whom they abuse in a friendly and mild manner. For example, in the song cited above, one of the children of the deceased is described as "having a big head". It is sung at most traditional burials. Reference is also made to the night wake-keeping which is observed by the children of the deceased on the night of the burial.

The second song rendered is as follows:

Ògòdòmèrì o, Ògòdòmèrì o,
Owó osùn, owó àdín o,
A fi rẹmu mu.

<u>Loosely translated, the song reads:</u>

The deceased had no contagious disease,
We have washed the body,
The camwood money, and the kernel oil money,
Has been used by us to buy palm-wine.

The *ìsọ̀gán* are here saying that they were able to wash the body because the deceased had no infection of smallpox. Had he been infected, they could not have been responsible for washing and burying it. Since they have washed the body, the deceased's children have generously given them gifts of money with which to decorate and anoint the body. Among the Yoruba, camwood (*Pterocarpus Erinacous*) is rubbed on the body as a powder[24] while palm kernel oil is used as a pomade which is rubbed on the body and hair. The gifts of money which the deceased's children gave to the *ìsọ̀gán* is for this purpose - to be used in beautifying the body. However, rather than use it for this purpose, they (*ìsọ̀gán*) use it to buy palm-wine for their entertainment at the burial maintaining that the body has been decorated and does not need camwood and kernel oil.

The *ìsọ̀gán* also sing a special song for the children of the deceased, in which they talk positively of the likely fate of the dead in heaven. The children are encouraged to dance to this particular song which says:

A ń rí bàbá / yèyé rẹ 'ún ọ ò,
A ń rí bàbá / yèyé rẹ 'ún ọ ò,

Bàbá / yèyé rẹ dádé owó,
Bàbá / yèyé rẹ wẹ̀wù oyè,
A ń rí bàbá / yèyé rẹ 'ún ọ ò.

Translation.

We are "looking" at your parent, }
And reporting this to you, } 2ce
Your parent has put on a crown made of money,
Your parent has put on a dress,
Meant for titled people.

Here, the *ìsọ̀gán* are raising the hopes of the deceased's children by predicting that their parent will be prosperous in heaven and even assume a titled position. Since it is a song of hope, the children dance happily to the song. We will now look at the way in which the *ìsọ̀gán* are entertained with food and drinks.

The Feasting of the *Ìsọ̀gán:* All those who prepare food are each obliged to present at least about four plates of food to members of the *ìsọ̀gán* as a token of appreciation for their roles in the burial process. In most cases, cartons of beer and crates of mineral drinks are added to these. The old and some younger children join members of

the *ìsọ̀gán* in eating the food presented to them. While men are pressed to give out alcoholic drinks to them, they are usually satisfied with women celebrants who offer them food alone.

When they are satisfied with the quantity and quality of food and drinks presented to them, they sing endlessly. In the past, (up till the early 1970s), they carried the dead (in the coffin) around the neighbourhood amid loud singing. (Bascom 1969b:68).

In certain instances, if the *ìsọ̀gán* feel that a certain person has offered them insufficient food or drinks, they may send for him and ask him why he has treated them shabbily. He may prostrate, ask for forgiveness and inform them of his present financial difficulties. With a person in such circumstances, they are usually sympathetic. Sometimes, the culprit may refuse to appear in the *Àkòdì* to defend himself.

When this happens, they either send his food back to him or threaten to seize some of his pots and plates used for cooking and serving food. If this fails to bring out the desired result of an apology, they may in extreme cases, refuse to help any further in the burial. The sanction used on such occasion is a punitive reaction

meant to serve as a warning to those who may like to behave in a similar way in future.

The ancestors of the lineage who are thought to continuously hover around the *Àkòdì* are believed to be the ones who consume the essence of the food and drinks.

Wrapping up the Body:

Shortly before burial in the evening, the *ìsọ̀gán* assemble again in the home of the deceased. Their task this time is to wrap up the dead in a shroud.

The largest shroud is spread on the bed, or on the floor. About seven to nine smaller ones are spread on it. The body is brought from the place where it was displayed and placed on the layers of shroud. The hooks of cotton wool used to tie the two feet together are removed. (The dead is never tied up in any way while wrapping it up. If this was done, it is believed that the dead would arrive in heaven in bondage, fully tied up).

All the cotton buds in the nostrils, ears and other orifices are removed as it is believed that if left there, they may hinder the dead, cause discomfort and loss of the use of the senses of the dead (especially that of smell and hearing) in the afterlife and when reborn.

The layers of shroud are folded to cover the body, starting from the first layer beneath the body. When all the layers have been used to wrap the body, the cotton bud is used to tie up the last layer neatly at two places: at the head and the legs. If the deceased was a man, nine knots are made at these two points while seven knots are made with the cotton buds for a woman.[25]

Once the *isọ̀gán* are satisfied that the body has been neatly wrapped up, about six men would carry the body (three at the head and three at the feet) and put it into the coffin. The cotton buds used to tie up the shroud are removed together with the knots and then put in the coffin.

A carpenter, usually the maker of the coffin, is asked to nail up the coffin. The lid is then put on top of the coffin and nailed at about four points. A whole shroud is torn up into two and rolled up as two strong ropes. It is with these that the coffin is lowered into the grave at the head and feet.

<u>Summary:</u>

A person becomes resigned to the idea of his own death. The attitude of people towards the death of others is that of sympathy. Besides, the death of another person

reflects the temporary nature of our existence on earth. This explains the reason why the Ife people do not gloat over the death of another.

There are many types of burials in Ile-Ife, each burial corresponds with the kind of death which kills the victim. For this purpose, burials in Ile-Ife can be broadly classified into two: those which need the attention of traditional religious priests of the divinities and members of their different Cults; and those which do not. Deaths through unusual means like suicide, lightning and falling wall are considered to be polluting. Members of the different Cults of the divinities are usually invited to purify the body, bury it and make the house of the deceased safe.

The digging of the grave, the washing, dressing and wrapping-up of the body are performed by the *isọgán* of each lineage. The children and relatives of the dead are obliged to provide lots of food and drink for the *isọgán* burial guild. In Chapter 5, the burial rituals of the old will be discussed.

Endnotes:

1. See also Field 1961:196-197.

[2]. Among the Ẹdo of Midwestern Nigeria, young men who die become ghosts and walk about in the forest, appearing to people on local farms (Bradbury 1969:146).

[3]. Pa Braimọh Ajayi, Personal Communication on August 8, 1989 at Ile-Ife.

[4]. For more details on the importance of funerals, see Field, *ibid*, page 199.

[5]. Recited for me by Chief 'Tunji Adeyẹfa on the 30th August 1990.

[6]. Similarly in Murelaga, a person remains calm when faced with imminent death. (Douglass 1969:22-23).

[7]. This is implied in Ajuwọn (1989:189 & 192).

[8]. This is because the Ife say that the dead has become a "truthful" person (*olootọ*); that is to say, if anything bad or untrue were to be said about him, he cannot come back from the grave to defend himself. The same is true of the Greeks who will not "say anything false or slanderous against the dead...because they are judged to have already become better and stronger". (Garland 1985:10).

[9]. See Peel (1983:129) on the subject of farms reverting "to bush".

[10]. See also Gluckman 1962:2-3.

11. Source: The Ọbadio, Personal communication, June 16, 1989 at Ile-Ifẹ.

12. The only exception is at the burial of the *Ifa* priest at which his fellow priests take part in the funeral.

13. Hence in the 19th Century, a man may be referred to as *ìwàlẹ̀, i.e.,* "a digger of graves". (Ellis 1894:157). This confirms Schwab's assertion that participation in funeral ceremonies is one of the responsibility of the lineage. (1955:357).

14. Recited for me by Chief 'Tunji Adeyefa on 15th August, 1990.

15. On the importance of people who dig graves in the society, see Bascom 1969a:253.

16. Pa Braimọh Ajayi, Personal communication, June 20, 1989 at Ile-Ifẹ.

17. A mortar, *odó,* is a hollowed wooden item used for pounding yam by the Yoruba. The wooden, heavy pestle used for pounding the yam inside the mortar is known as *ọmọ odó.*

18. In Alto Minho, just as in Ifẹ, the dead themselves sometimes give an indication of who is going to die next. (Pina-Cabral 1986:217).

[19]. This is to show that the deceased is not "helpless"; for him/her, life has resumed elsewhere.

[20]. This is done because it is only the clean that are admitted to the sphere of the ancestors in the afterlife. (Awolalu 1979:55; 1980:29). The body is washed to remove all the impediments and signs of this world. The deceased is separated from the world by this act.

[21]. Source: Mr. Samson Adedini, Personal communication at Ilọ́rọ̀, Ile-Ifẹ on 12th July, 1989.

[22]. Basọ̀m notes that this "play of the dead" is undertaken "to amuse the dead". (1969a:253).

[23]. Mr. Adedini, Personal communication, July 11, 1989 at Ile-Ife.

[24]. This practice is also found among the Ibi bio of Southern Nigeria. (Talbot 1923:142).

[25]. In Yoruba numerology, nine is always used for men while seven is always used for women. (Buckley 1985b:120).

CHAPTER 5.

BURIAL RITUALS OF THE AGED.

When an old person stops breathing, the pulse is felt and the eyes are examined. The temperature is also felt. All these are attempts to make sure that the person has indeed died. Once it is confirmed[1] that the death of the old has taken place, children and women openly wail.

The death of the old (*arúgbó*) does not attract much wailing. (Lucas 1948:224). Rather, it is a time of joy and thanksgiving for two reasons. Firstly, the deceased is thought to have completed his lifespan on earth because of his advanced age. Thanksgiving is therefore given for the person's ability to go through the perils of life without being cut off in the prime of life.2 Secondly, people rejoice because the old is survived by children and grandchildren. The deceased has got children to replace him or her and perpetuate the family line. He or she has thus not died "completely".

At the death of the old, kegs of palm-wine and bottles of beer are immediately bought and served to sympathizers by the children and relatives of the deceased. Such a death is not considered as an *ọ̀kú ọ́fọ̀*, "mournful death". Rather, it is regarded as an *ọ̀kú ẹ̀bà*,

which means "death celebrated by eating cassava food with soup and meat".

When all the children and relatives are informed of the death, they go to the house of the deceased to view the corpse and make enquiries about the situation of the deceased at the time of death. Those who have not seen the deceased for a long time before his death ask from the immediate family of the dead whether the deceased had fallen sick suddenly; or if he had been sick for some time; the duration of the illness until the time of death; whether he had been hospitalized; the last statements said by the dead and his disposition at the time of death.

Although the death of the old is not regarded as a mournful one, it is nevertheless deeply felt as a loss by the children, for as the Yoruba say, there are certain forms of help which the old render to the young. Part of it is the guidance of their children with the wisdom which comes with the attainment of old age. Another is the help which the old, both men and women, but most especially women, render with child-minding.(Aronson 1978:136).

The children and relatives weep and wail for a brief spell of time. A member of the family is sent to inform

the head of the lineage, *Baale*. He, together with the *Lóógun* have the responsibility of sending messages to all members of the lineage about the death. People on the farms in the villages; those who work in other villages and towns; children and relatives of the dead in distant cities are all sent to most of those people while a few others are informed by telephone and telegrams. When almost all the children and siblings of the dead arrive, a meeting is held.

The Meeting:

The venue of the meeting is always the house of the deceased. Usually present at this meeting are the siblings and children of the dead and a number of his relatives, close and extended. Food and drinks are usually presented to all present by the children of the deceased, but this part is left until the end of the meeting.

The main topic for discussion centres on the date of burial and the date when the funeral should be performed. Four main considerations which largely determine the date of burial and funerals are as follows. Firstly, if some of the children and siblings of the dead have not arrived by then, a consensus may be reached to postpone the date

of the second funeral for some weeks or months, (Willett 1967:26), although the burial may be done immediately.

Secondly, since most of the people responsible for the burial and funeral expenses are farmers, effort is made to ensure that the date of the funeral particularly falls in the peak of the cocoa season.

Thirdly and most important, funerals are not celebrated during *Èdì* festival[3] in Ile-Ife. Hence the Ife people say that "the person who dies during *Edi* festival has offended the divinities". It is thought that he has offended the divinities because he has died at a time which is not the proper time for the celebration of funerals.

A few days before the celebration of *Edi* festival, a ban on drumming is imposed until a few days after the festival. This is referred to in Ife as *kíká ilẹ̀*, which means "the rolling up of the earth". The meaning of this is that all the social and secular activities are temporarily suspended because it is a period of sober reflection by the people of Ifẹ; this is particularly true when they consider the death of Ẹ̀là, Mọ̀rẹ̀mi's son.

It is also a sacred period of time, when it is believed that all the divinities come down to Ile-Ifẹ from heaven. At funerals in Ile-Ifẹ, drums are beaten

and different songs are rendered. This is not possible during the period of the festival as drumming is banned for the seven days which the festival lasts.[4] (Walsh 1948:232). Hand-clapping is however allowed. At the family meeting, the dates of the celebration of the festival are avoided as possible dates for the burial or the celebration of the funeral.

Lastly, the funeral of the old is always temporarily suspended until some weeks or months after the death and burial of any youth in the lineage.[5] A certain period of time is left for the mourning of the young man and for recuperation and adjustment to the loss. If the funeral of the old is celebrated immediately without taking the death of the young into consideration, it is regarded by the parents of the deceased youth not only as an affront, but also as a form of gloating over their misfortune. If a youth dies even after the date of the funeral of the old has been decided, an emergency meeting can always be arranged to decide on a new date.

The siblings of the deceased have a right at this meeting to insist on the date which is convenient for them. This is not to say that the wishes of the children are not considered. Distant relatives have not much say

in the choice of a date for their expenses at the funeral would not be considerable.

Transporting the Corpse to its Hometown:

Sometimes an Ife man may die in another town outside Ile-Ifẹ. The corpse necessarily has to be brought to Ile-Ife for burial. Among the Yoruba, people from each group closely identify themselves with their town of origin. If they are successful as traders, or migrant workers elsewhere, they go back to their town of origin to build houses there. (Berry 1985:65 and 78). At death, their corpses are also taken back to their town of origin for burial. For every Yoruba, his town of origin is his ideal final resting place.[6]

When someone from Ifẹ dies, the body has to be brought to Ile-Ife for burial. A pick-up van is rented and a lot of people who own cars are invited to follow the procession from Ile-Ifẹ to the town where the deceased lived at the time of death. On arrival, the coffin containing the body is put in the van; the motorcade then prepare to file back to Ile-Ifẹ.

A fare-fowl (*adìyẹ ìràǹà*) is slaughtered. Large bunches of young palm fronds (*mọ̀nrìwò*) are tied to the bonnet of each car. (Babalọla 1989:165). The slaughtered

fowl is to help the deceased in his journey by providing a hitch-free route for the motorcade and the corpse. (Bascom 1969b:66).[7] It is also useful in the provision of an unhindered route for the deceased in its journey to heaven.

As for the palm-fronds, it would prevent the tyres of the vehicles from shattering and exploding. The belief is that the palm-fronds will make the body seem lighter in weight and scare away all other ghosts who would occupy themselves with slowing down the motorcade. The deceased is believed to travel ahead of the motorcade and is thought to be the first person to arrive at Ile-Ife.

If the vehicle used to transport the corpse is rented, the cost is usually very high. First, the job of the driver and the use to which the vehicle is put is rather very unusual since the vehicle is in most cases not a hearse. The driver is full of fear as he sees his job as a dangerous one: the tyre may burst, the vehicle may skid off the road, he may die in the process or lose his vehicle. He also has to go into the trouble of cutting and fixing palm-fronds to the bonnet of his vehicle. At the same time, the driver is happy that he is making a lot of money (sometimes four days' fares) on a return trip. Besides, a vehicle used to transport a

corpse is deemed to have been blessed with abundant good luck. It is believed that for several days after the use of his van as a temporary hearse, the driver would continue to make a greater margin of profit from the fares paid by his passengers. When a driver is invited to help transport a corpse from one place to another, he normally has mixed feelings about the job.

The question then arises: Apart from wanting to lie in the ground with the ancestors, is there any other reason why the corpse should be brought back to Ilé-Ifẹ̀ for burial? In the Ifa verse known as *Ọ̀yẹ̀kú Méjì*,8 we see the story of two titled people: Alápà-Ilé (the King Ọọ̀ni of Ifẹ̀) and Alápà-Oko (Elédìsí). While the former lived and reigned in Ile-Ifẹ, the latter lived and reigned as Ooni's appointee on the farms. Both of them fell sick and died at the same time. Mourners on both sides wanted to transport the two corpses to the other side for burials. They met at the town gate and discovered that mourners on both sides wore the same type of dress. It was remarked that it was a befitting ceremony for the two dead people. That is said to have been the begining of the practice of bringing the body of an Ife back home for burial in Ilé-Ifẹ̀. This practice is still very much alive, even today.

Preservation of the Corpse:

The body is usually buried one or two days after death. It is almost impossible to leave the corpse in the house after that period because of the heat generated by the sun in the tropics.[9] If the corpse is kept in the house after two days, it may start to decompose and smell. When mourners want to keep the body in the house for a longer period either because the deceased has said before death that he detested being placed in the morgue; or because they are still waiting for some of the deceased's children to arrive from the towns where they live and work, one of the following methods (or a combination) are used to keep the body from putrefaction.

Buds of cotton wool may be put in all the orifices of the body to prevent insects, flies and worm from entering the body and causing putrefaction. A small bottle of dry gin may be poured into the deceased's throat. Gin is thought to possess the ability to reverse or slow down the rate of decomposition. Chief M.O. Fashogbon informed me that this method is used by members of the Reformed Ògbóni Fraternity (R.O.F.).[10]

Sometimes the corpse is turned over and made to lie on its belly. It is believed that this would prevent the

stomach from swelling up and bursting with disastrous consequences. This method is still popular today.

Bottles of sweet-smelling perfumes and lavender are sprayed onto the corpse. It is the smell of these which fill up the room thereby eliminating the smell of rotting body. Insecticides are also sprayed onto the floors and windows of the room to prevent flies from infecting the body. A fan is also put at the side of the bed. It blows away flies and keeps the temperature in the room cool. Windows and doors are also kept open to enhance the circulation of the air in the room.

Educated children of the deceased may invite a doctor to view the corpse and inject it with certain drugs which slows down or completely eliminate putrefaction for some time. This method is said to be very effective.

A cold coal iron may be put on the chest of the deceased when all its dress has been removed. The iron can be left on the deceased's chest for as long as possible. It is often said by the elders that this is an effective way of preserving the corpse.[11]

Medicinal herbs and roots of certain trees may be used to prepare an ointment which is used to massage the body; the herbs may also be burnt. (Abiọdun 1976:5). It

can prevent putrefaction for weeks. This method is not commonly used because a lot of people do not know the names of the herbs. The composition of the medicine is a closely-guarded secret.[12]

Very often, wealthy children often deposit the body of their parents in the Ife State Hospital morgue if the deceased has not raised any objection to this method before death. This is an expensive option because the fees to be paid is assessed at a daily rate.

On a final note, the very rich in Ile-Ifẹ often take the corpse of their parent to the State Hospital where it is embalmed by pathologists. This is a more recent practice. Because the cost is prohibitive, the poor and the middle-class do not use this method to preserve the body of their parents.

ÒKÚ WÍWÁ: The Process of Looking for the Dead.

When it is confirmed that the old has died, the children of the deceased and their wives and possibly the grandchildren hire a band of drummers (who beat the Yoruba pressure drums known as *dùndún* and *gángan*) and proceed in the middle of the night or very early in the morning to "look for the deceased".

This practice consists of all these people singing, dancing and going round the city, especially in the areas where the deceased has relatives on both sides - paternal and maternal. It is believed that the dead goes into the streets to roam about shortly after death. There is then the possibility that the offsprings of the dead may meet him/her on the street that night. They therefore dance and look for him/her, though they know that in reality it is possible only in dreams.

The Yoruba express it thus: "It would only seem as if one sees the person, as if one sees a person who resembles the dead; One can only meet the dead on the road suddenly (when one is not prepared for such meeting; the dream is the surest way of seeing the dead and most importantly, the dead can be seen in the course of divination". (Abimbọla 1973a:60).

The implication of this is that looking for the dead in the night will not serve the primary purpose because those who suddenly meet the dead on the road are those who do not actually seek the dead. The Yoruba belief behind this saying is that the dead reveals itself only to a chosen few. Even if a person desires to see the dead, he may not if he is not among the chosen few.

In this regard, they sing about their inability to see him/her after a search and inform people of his/her travel into the ground, in the process of becoming an inhabitant of *Orun*, heaven. The song is as follows:

À ń waa,
A ò rii,
Kabi bàbá rè?
Bàbá lọ sísàlẹ̀,
Ó ń ṣe 'rá Ọ̀run.

Translation:

We are searching for him,
We cannot find him,
Where has father gone?
Father has gone into the ground,
Where he has become a citizen of heaven.[13]

This song actually confirms the idea of the place where the dead is believed to go after death: into the ground physically by burial and into the ground in spirit form to be interrogated. He is seen no more on earth but has become a member of heaven by his descent into the ground where he is welcomed by heavenly beings.

Other purposes which are served by looking for the dead in this way are mainly two. Firstly, since the Yoruba believe that it is those who are survived and buried by their children that can actually be described as parents, the offsprings use the occasion to publicly declare and celebrate the fact that their deceased parent has indeed been confirmed as a parent since they have survived him/her and are now set to bury him/her. Hence they sing the following songs:

Ọmọ láyọ̀lé,
Ẹni ọmọ sin lọ́ bímọ,
Ọmọ láyọ̀lé,
Ẹni ọmọ sin lọ́ bímọ.

Translation:

Having children is nothing to be happy about,
It is the person who is buried by his chidlren,
Who really had children.[14]

Secondly, looking for the dead in this way afford them the opportunity of announcing to relatives and friends of the deceased that the death of that person has taken place. The dead is then described in the song as a mighty

person, meaning, an important person. Hence, the use of the word "elephant" to describe him.[15] The song says:

Erín wó,
Àjànàkú bàbá sílè,
Erin wó,
Erin mà wó,
Erin mà wó ò,
Erin wó,
Àjànàkú bàbá sílè,
Erin wó.

Translation:

The elephant has fallen,
Ajanaku, the father of Sílè,
The elephant has fallen,
The elephant has indeed fallen,
He has indeed fallen.
The elephant has fallen,
Ajanaku, the father of Sílè,
The elephant has fallen.[16]

Women were not generally described with the word "elephant". It was for men that this was usually used. Being described as an elephant is thus a masculine attribute. But in recent years, people have actually used this word to describe their late mother. On evening in August 1989, Mrs Jade Akinwande died in Ile-Ifẹ. The children, grandchildren and their wives went in search of the deceased in the middle of the night. They sang the above song, inserting the word *yèyé*, "mother" where the word "father" appears in the text.

"The elephant has fallen"[17] here signifies the death of an important woman. The elephant only supports its trunk on a tree or a wall. If the elephant falls down, the weight is so great and heavy that the elephant is not able to lift itself up from the ground again. When this happens to the elephant in the African forest, its hour of death has arrived. It is in this connection that the death of the elephant is compared to the death of the woman.

Another song which is normally sung when searching for a deceased woman is written below.

Ìyá relé ò,
Ilé rẹ̀ ló lọ,

Ẹ̀nìkan ò soge soge,
Kó́ gbàgbé́ ilé́.

Translation:

Mother has gone home,
It is to her home she has gone,
No one dresses smartly and in splendour,
And forgets her home.[18]

Here, the deceased woman is reported to have gone home. She could not forget her home just because she was always smartly dressed. This represents the glamour and the sweetness of life which a woman may find difficult to leave behind in this world. The woman who dies has "decided" that she would rather go on to her home (which is heaven) than stay here on earth indefinitely because of such glamour. She has gone home and has thus not forgotten her home.

We see that the rite of looking for the dead not only serves as a means of rejoicing (by the children) at their surviving their parents, it is also a way of announcing the news of the death of their parent to friends and members of the kin group. Not all deaths are announced in this way. This practice is fast fading away

and only about one in ten deaths of the old are announced in this way.

Visits to the Bereaved Family by Sympathizers.

Immediately a death is announced, sympathizers start to pay condolence visits to the family of the bereaved in the home of the dead. No specific time is allocated for these visits but visitors go to the home of the bereaved whenever they are free to do so. The bereaved, on their part, get ready to receive sympathizers immediately after the death has taken place.

The women spread mats on the floor of the corridors, living rooms, and their rooms where they sit and wail. Even when they have stopped wailing, they usually start all over again if a group of sympathizers who come to visit them start wailing. They do this, because, they claim to be moved to tears by the emotional reaction of sympathizers. The joint wailing stops after a few minutes.

The sympathizers are then asked to sit on the mat with the women. The bereaved women have to narrate to the visitors, the circumstances surrounding the death. The activities of the deceased while alive are recalled and only good things are openly said about him/her.

On their own part, sympathizers console the bereaved and rejoice with them that they have survived their old one, (*arúgbó wọn*). They also greet them as follows: *Ẹ kú ìnáwó* meaning "Greetings on the money you are spending". Reference here is on the large amount of money usually spent by the children, wives and relatives of the deceased on burial and funeral ceremonies. It is also in this connection that the sympathizers greet the bereaved with the phrase *Ọlọ́run á bo àsírí*, which means "God will provide enough money for your use". Sometimes, they are also greeted like this: *Ẹ kú àṣèhìndè*, which means "Greetings on your ability to survive your parents and take care of the burial". Here, the sympathizers rejoice with the bereaved about their good luck in surviving the dead and taking care of the burial and funeral. It is also in this connection that they greet them that "Just as you have survived your old ones, may your own children survive you too". It is thus seen as a thing of joy for children to survive their parents.

Prayers may also be said by the sympathizers for the bereaved. In this respect, they say *Ẹ̀hìn bàbá/màmá á dára ò*, which means "the aftermath of father/mother will be good". Reference here is to the events that may take place after the burial of the deceased; that the events

should all turn out to be good ones, like safe childbirth for the women (offspring and children's wives); housewarming ceremonies; getting big jobs; amassing wealth, *etc.*

But when bad things happen after the death of a parent, like the loss of jobs, death of children, loss of properties, illness and court cases, then the aftermath of the dead is not good. To activate the good events rather than the bad ones, sympathizers often pray for the bereaved that *Bàbá/Màmá rẹ á gbọ́run gbè ọ́*, which means "May your father/mother always support you from heaven". A person such aided will have things working for him at the time he wants it. If he is looking for a good job, he will get it; likewise plenty of money and other good things of life. (Drewal & Drewal 1983:61). Sympathizers also pray for the bereaved thus: "May the father/mother come back/reincarnate as a child". This emanates from the Yoruba belief in reincarnation which we discussed earlier on in the study. It is believed that if the wives in the lineage are truthful and do not engage in exra-marital affairs, they will always give birth to the reincarnated ancestors of their husbands. (Chief M.O. Fashọgbọn, personal communication, August 12, 1989).

The bereaved usually offer to sympathizers, biscuits, kolanuts (*cola acuminata*), *ẹ̀ko* (solid pap food), *àkàrà* (fried bean cakes), *ọ̀ọ̀lẹ̀* (boiled bean cake), palm-wine, mineral drinks and water.[19] Proper meals are presented to sympathizers some hours after the death has taken place.

If the deceased was a woman, there may be another additional cause for rejoicing. It is believed that most witches confess to killing lots of people and are said to mention the names of their victims shortly before their (witches') death. But when an old woman dies peacefully without confessing that she was a witch who has killed or maimed, her sons' wives, her daughters and their children feel very happy and relieved that the good name of the family has not been dragged in the mud.

Those wives and other women in the neighbourhood who are wives of relatives feel proud and free to associate their names with the deceased's. They praise her and refer to her as "the good mother". They clap and sing her praises. The text of the song is as follows:

E wí winrín winrìn,
E wí winrín winrìn,
Ìyá Oge kú,

Ṣe ló ṣenu mínrín o.

Translation:

She did not confess to commission of abominable deeds,
She did not confess to commission of evil acts,
The fashionable mother died,
In complete silence.[20]

The women all sing and dance round the compound. Children and relatives of the deceased give them gifts of money. They are proud that the deceased was not a witch. Had she confessed to killing and harming people, the women would not have had the boldness to do this. Rather, most of the women who join in the singing and dancing would have been saying (although privately and behind the backs of the children and their wives) that the woman confessed to having killed a lot of people. This would have brought ridicule and disgrace to the children especially. When passing along, people would be showing them to others as the child of so-and-so who confessed to killing so-and-so with witchcraft. It is an incident usually remembered years after the death of the deceased.

Whether the deceased is male or female, the wives of the children and relatives recite the *oriki orile*, praise poem of the deceased (given to him at birth), praise him, and ask him to greet the other departed ancestors.[21] It is not only on the occasion of death that the Ife people resort to the rendering of a person's *oriki*. In daily greetings, people recite the *oriki orile* of the person being greeted. But when a younger person greets an older one, he does not recite the older person's praise poem. A younger person is supposed to show respect and deference to an older person. Reciting the praise poem of the older would be showing disrespect to him. At death, the situation is a bit different. The younger can now recite the praise poem of the dead, not out of disrespect but as a way of praising, adoring and bidding him farewell.[22]

The unintended by-product of the recitation of the praise poem of the dead is its ability to make people become very emotional about the death of the person. As the Ife put it, it "makes the head swell up", that is, it makes the listeners become reflective of the activities of the dead and the loss it is to the society. A feeling of sadness therefore develops and people shed tears freely.

Sympathizers generally pay visits to the bereaved in case of the death of the old. One of the reasons for this is that they (sympathizers) expect such visit from the bereaved when they (sympathizers) lose their own parents. If a person fails to express his condolences to the bereaved, or does not pay a timely visit, s/he is paid back with the same coin in future. The visits and the actions of sympathizers are entirely reciprocal.

The second reason is that some sympathizers go to visit the bereaved out of sheer curiosity. They would want to witness the burial, witness the funeral and thereby be in a position to assess the wealth of the children of the bereaved.

Thirdly, there is the provision of free food and drinks for sympathizers. The family of the dead and other relatives have to provide not only enough food and drinks, they also have to make sure that there is a big surplus. If they do not provide enough, they are referred to as misers and ridiculed for their stinginess. We shall return to this before the end of the chapter.

Sympathizers do not have to wear a special type of dress to the house of the bereaved in order to pay their condolences, especially shortly after death. The house of

the bereaved is open to sympathizers from five o'clock in the morning until about 11.00 pm.

People do not need to book an appointment to visit the bereaved. It is the practice among the Ife that sympathizers just troop to the house of the bereaved as soon as the death is announced. It is not only the wives and children of the dead that are visited by sympathizers. Siblings and close relatives of the dead too are visited by sympathizers who condole them of the loss.

At the death of the old, the wives, children and relatives of the deceased are not in mourning and so do not put on mourning clothes and dresses. Rather, they are in a state of joy for having survived their husband and parent.

Places of Burial:

The old who is a worshipper of one of the divinities is usually buried at home after death. It was this practice which partly explains why some of the Yoruba refused to become Christians in the latter part of the 19th century and in the early 20th century. Christian missionaries then insisted on the dead being buried in christian cemeteries blessed for this purpose. It was

unimaginable for the old to be buried in a cemetery since, according to practice in Yorubaland, it was those who died from communicable and infectious diseases who were normally taken to the forest for burial. (Oduyọye 1978:266).

The question is: If buried in the bush, would they not be exposed to the mercy of the elements - sun, rain? How would the children have access to the graveyard to speak to the dead and pour libations? It is still for these same reasons that the old who worship the divinities are buried at home, even today.[23]

The verandah of the house is one of the places where the grave might be dug. It may also be dug in front of the house, the side of the house or the back of the house. Sometimes, the grave may be located in the entrance hall of the house. Although there is an edict which prohibits the burying of the dead in the vicinity of the house, (Parrinder 1972:42), the edict has never been enforced in Southwestern Nigeria. People thus bury their dead wherever they like.

<u>The Burial Shroud:</u>

Among the Yoruba, the dead are usually buried with white clothes.[24] This is the colour of the shroud used

for the burial of the old and adults. Red is never used for burial.[25] There are other reasons why red clothes are never used for burial.

Firstly, it is believed that if red clothes are used to bury the dead, the dead may be reborn as a baby with skin problems, particularly leprosy. (Buckley 1985b:62-3; Bascom 1969b:67).

The second reason could be traced to a myth. In it, there was the "refusal" of "clothes of all sorts of colour" to offer the prescribed sacrifice. The mother of the King Ooni died soon afterwards. The King asked that "clothes of all colours" be brought to the palace so that he could choose some with which to bury his mother. Out of the whole lot (one hundred and fifty-five types) of clothes offered to him, he made a remark that red is a respectable and prestigious cloth and should not be used for burials. Since that day, the red cloth has become a "prestigious item", that is *ẹni ọ̀wọ̀*.[26] This story from *Ọ̀yẹ̀kú Méjì* in the *Ifa* Corpus is used by people in Ifẹ to explain why red clothes are never used.

The white shroud used for burying the dead are contributed by the children, wives and relatives of the deceased. The pattern of the contribution will be discussed below.

The Kin Group and the System of Shroud Donation.

When a person dies, his children and relatives - close and extended - donate many white shrouds with which the dead is buried. (Johnson 1921:137 & Gleason 1992:83). It is this donation of shroud prior to the time of burial which actually indicates that the deceased is a blood relative of the donor. When a person says that another is his relative, it is not enough to convince people that there is a kinship relationship of some sort between them. Real kinship affinity (on both paternal and maternal sides) is shown by the donation of a roll of shroud at the time of death. Hence, in Ile-Ifẹ, the relative is described as *àkúmásọsin*, which literally means, "those who donate a roll of shroud at death for burial".[27] While among the Merina of Madagascar, it is burial in the same tomb which denotes strong kinship relationship, (Bloch 1976:122-124), among the Ifẹ it is the donation of a roll of shroud for burial.

Whether a person donates a whole roll of shroud or gives out only a roll collectively bought with a few other people depends on how closely related he is to the deceased. As the Ife people say, *àgbárúwá ní ká*, which means "relationship has so many branches". The history of

relationship in the lineage, the geneaology of the lineage and the relationship of the deceased with members of the extended families on both sides - paternal and maternal- are constantly related to young people, wives and children. It is this history that people fall upon when a death takes place in the lineage.

All the wives and children of the deceased are expected to donate a roll of white shroud each for the burial. The cloth provided by each wife is in return for the cover-cloth with which the husband covered the wife when the marriage was consummated. (Bascom 1969b:67). Husbands, children and relatives also provide clothes for the burial of wives. Children and young people who have no means of livelihood are exempted. But if all the children of a particular woman are still very young, the mother has to provide one roll of shroud on behalf of herself and her children.

The uterine brothers and sisters of the deceased also have to present a roll of shroud each. As for the brothers and sisters of the deceased (from other wives), all the children of the same mother donate just a roll of shroud jointly.

In the donation of shroud, there is an element of reciprocity. If the "children of the deceased's father"

each donate a piece of shroud for the burial of their brother, the onus is on the deceased's children to donate a roll of shroud when each of the donors die. On the other hand, if the "children of the deceased's father" failed to donate a roll of shroud for the burial, the onus is on the deceased's children not to donate any shroud for the culprits' burial when they die. Besides, non-donation may eventually lead to the culprits' family not been accepted as blood relatives.

It was stated earlier that a person who donates a roll of shroud for the burial of a kinsman indirectly sends the same roll to his parent or grandparent for use in heaven. Although the dead are not believed to wear these shroud in heaven, they are only used as cover cloth which they use as quilts to cover themselves before they sleep every night in heaven.

The names of the donors are written down by the children of the deceased and kept for future reference. It is not unusual to collect as many as fifty rolls or more.[28] Since it is impossible to use all of these to wrap the body, the rest are kept in the house of the deceased. When another death is announced in the lineage, or from the group of relatives, a roll is taken from these by the children of the deceased. It is then donated

as their own contribution. They continue to do this until all the rolls are used up. Thereafter, they resort to buying from cloth-sellers.

<u>The Coffin:</u> This is called *Ọpọ́nsí* or *À̀à̀sẹ̀*. It is the responsibility of the brothers of the deceased to buy planks of wood, hire a carpenter and pay for the making and decoration of the coffin. If the aforementioned people are not able to afford the cost, the children of the dead have to pay for this or buy one ready-made from the coffin parlour.

When the coffin is made locally, the *ò̀mọ̀* tree (*Cordia Millenii*) are used by the carpenters. Skilled carpenters are hired for this job. Greetings to the dead may be inscribed on the coffin with brass. Mostly used are greetings such as *Sùn un re ò̀*, which means "Sleep the good sleep". Sometimes, the names of the deceased and the date of death are inscribed on the coffin. The possibility of these being done depends on the extent of the wealth of the children.

Since the worth of the coffin is an indication of the level of income of the children of the deceased, sympathizers and even relatives of the deceased look forward to seeing the type of coffin used for the burial.

If the coffin is an expensive one, people talk about it for months after the burial and pray that they may be buried in such coffin. If, on the other hand, the coffin is made of ordinary white, soft and brittle wood, people also talk for a long time about the extreme stinginess of the children. The coffin is brought to the house of the deceased and there it is openly displayed for all to see and assess.

The Play of the Women at the Funeral:

The wives of the male members of the lineage sing, clap and dance round the compound, asking the children and relatives to give them gifts of money. One of the songs they sing is as follows:

Àwòyè la wo bàbá/ìyá o,
Ẹ mú owó dọ́kítà wá o.

Translation:

We were successful in taking care of father/mother,
And curing his/her illness,
We deserve the doctor's fees.[29]

Here, the women are singing that though the parent died and they were not able to treat her successfully for

her ailments, they nevertheless tried so much. They therefore deserve the fee which could have been paid to the doctor irrespective of the eventual state of the patient. In other words, whether a patient survives or dies, the "doctor" has to be paid and since they have played the role of the "doctor", they too deserve the fee. Barber notes that a similar play of women takes place at funerals in Okuku. (1991:131).[30]

Among the Yoruba, the daughter-in-law is also responsible for taking care of the old mother-in-law. The old have to be fed, bathed, clothed and given medicines if they fall ill. It is to this basic responsibity of the daughter-in-law that the women are indirectly referring.

Viewing of the Body: When the body is laid out on the bed by the *isogan*, relatives and friends come to the bedside to view it. They talk about the disposition of the dead - that it looks calm as if it is in a deep slumber. The good deeds of the dead are recounted and people openly ask God to bless the deceased with the abundance of heaven. Privately, groups of sympathizers who leave the site talk frankly among themselves and assess the character of the deceased. If they assessed him to be a good man, they continue to praise him and wish him a good

time in heaven.[31] On the other hand, if they considered him to be a bad and wicked man, they comment that the world would be a better place without him. Bad deeds done by him are recounted.

The wives and children of the deceased also pay their respects to their husband and parents. They weep and talk to the dead, wishing him well on his journey home. (Idowu 1962:190). If there is tension and serious disagreement between the wives and children of different mothers, they do not all go together to view the dead and talk to him. The children of each mother go together to view the dead and express their greetings, feelings and reservations about his care over them and their mother. They implore the dead to eat the type of food which are eaten in heaven. He is asked not to eat worms.[32] Women who are relatives and wives of male members of the lineage recite the praise poem (*oríkì orílẹ̀*) of the dead.

Preparation of Food and Provision of Drinks:

It is the tradition that when an old man dies, food and drinks of different sorts have to be provided and offered to the *ìsọ̀gán*, friends, associates of the deceased, relatives and other sympathizers. This is done on two occasions: for the burial ceremony and the final

funeral ceremony. A lot of people are responsible for the provision of this food.

It is mandatory for the wives, siblings and children of the deceased to prepare and present food to sympathizers. A few other relatives also do so, although not all of them are under the obligation to do that. In this latter category, a person is obliged to prepare and give out food for sympathizers at a funeral if a similar obligation had been rendered by the bereaved at the funeral of the person's parent. A person therefore reciprocates the good gesture by preparing and providing food for sympathizers present at the burial.

As a rule, the neighbours of the deceased in the area generously allow the children and relatives of the dead to use their premises to cook, receive, sit and entertain sympathizers. This is the norm and landlords do not refuse to admit the bereaved into their homes for this purpose. It is a reciprocal arrangement whereby any of the hosts can use the home of the bereaved for the same purpose in future.

On both sides of the street, at the front of many houses, it is not unusual to find children and relatives of the deceased cooking outside those houses. The living rooms and some other reception rooms of those houses are

temporarily used as dining rooms where the sympathizers are entertained with food and drinks.

Cooks, stewards and chefs are not hired for cooking. (Some educated people do so these days). Rather, women who are wives of male members of the lineage and friends help with the cooking, the serving of food and drinks, the clearing of dishes, plates and bottles, and washing-up of the dishes. (Sudarkasa 1973:151).

Each group of celebrants who contribute money to cook together in each house receive sympathizers jointly, though any of the sympathizers may be the friend of a particular member of the group. The association of the wives of male members of the compound are also offered food and drinks by each group. Friends of the deceased, especially the members of his many associations,[33] societies and guilds also have to be entertained by all the celebrants.[34]

A person's prepared food goes to his own parents in heaven.[35] All other relatives who prepare food are also sending their food to their parents in an indirect way by offering food to sympathizers. This explains the reason why relatives are not reluctant to give out food at funerals.

Giving out food at burials and funerals is, in the thought of the Yoruba, equated with the giving of charity. It is in this regard that the last day of the final funeral ceremony is known as "the day of *Ṣàráà*". *Ṣàráà* means "charity or alms". (Abraham 1958:582). Beggars are also known as *Ṣàráà* by the Yoruba. The giving out of food to sympathizers on the day is here referred to as a sort of alms-giving or a charitable work. If the distribution of food is restricted to members of the immediate family of the host, the offering would not be acceptable to the ancestors.

A person who invites and presents food and drink to a lot of people at the funeral ceremony of his parent has fulfilled two basic requirements of the performance of the *Ṣàráà*. Firstly, he has satisfied his parent and other ancestors as the food eaten at the funeral finally finds its way to heaven, the realm of the ancestors and the divinities. Secondly, he has satisfied human beings by giving them food and drinks.

These two reasons partly explain the belief behind the warm hospitality of the Yoruba. It is believed that a person who has eaten from one's labours will not find it easy to harm or kill one. His evil thoughts and medicine may not be efficacious because of the victim's food and

drinks. The food conveys a certain amount of immunity on the hosts. When food is freely given out at naming ceremonies, "housewarming" and funerals, a note of this is believed to be taken by the divinities and the ancestors.[36] In times of personal crisis such as illness, these lavish acts become quite helpful.

The Burial Orchestra:

Drummers/orchestras are always invited for burials. Groups of *dùndún, gángan* and *ṣ̀ẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* drummers are invited by each celebrant by paying the sum of ten naira (N10) to each group. Each group also agree to attend the funeral by the acceptance of this amount of money.

Drumming, dancing and singing is an essential part of the burial and funeral ceremony at Ife. The traditional pressure drums called *dùndún* and *gángan* are beaten at funerals. An ensemble comprises at least about two *dùndún* (the bigger pressure drums); three *gángan* (the smaller pressure drums); and the *ṣ̀ẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* ("calabash-drum netted with strings of cowries....shaken to create a resounding noise", Abraham 1958:614). The pressure drums which are beaten with sticks have been correctly described as "talking drums" since they can be used to imitate the tones of Yoruba syllables. (Laoye 1959:10).

The calabash-drum is normally shaken to create a rattling sound.

The lead drummer beats a *dùndún* pressure drum and it is he, who dictates the piece to be played and the pace to be followed, with his own drum. Since Yoruba is a tonal language, it is not difficult for members of the orchestra and the dancers to recognize the exact tune being played, the person being praised, the families and the lineages being addressed by the lead drummer at any particular time. (Laoye, p. 5). A number of sympathizers at the funeral are also addressed and praised by the drummers. (Buckley 1985a:197). They respond by pasting currency notes on the foreheads of the drummers.

Drums are beaten only at the funeral of the old. (M.T. Drewal 1992:42; Barber 1991:173). The beating of the drums at the funeral of the old marks the change of the sphere of existence from this world to the afterlife. (Needham 1967:611 & 613).[37] It marks the end of the deceased's life and signifies the start of his existence as an ancestor. It is believed that dancing is a common practice of both the living and the dead. The music is thus suited for the dead and the ancestors who have come down from heaven to partake in the funeral. Although we can see human beings when they dance, the dead are

believed to dance but we cannot see them with our bare eyes. Spirits and other divine beings who are believed to attend the funeral also dance to the beat of the drums.

Since the *oríkì orílẹ̀* (praise poem) of the deceased and his children are recited by the drummers with their drums, the deceased is thought to be satisfied that he is given a decent and befitting funeral. While singing these songs, they also dance round the streets, receiving gifts of money from friends, relatives and neighbours. Currency notes are pasted on the foreheads of the dancers. But the monies are immediately passed on to the lead drummer who collects all such monies as the fees of the group.

If the monies are not handed over to the head drummer promptly, the drummers threaten to, and in fact, always stop beating the drums. They feel that the monies rightly belong to them as their fees. At the same time, the bereaved feel cheated by the drummers. They feel that since the monies were gifts given to them by people known personally to them, the drummers were wrong and greedy to ask for all the amount, more especially, since the bereaved are also obliged to present food and drinks to the drummers.

One of the songs rendered by the dancers is as follows:

Lead: *Màmá/Bàbá relé o,*

Chorus: *Ilé lo lọ tàràrà,*

Lead: *Màmá/Bàbá relé o,*

Chorus: *Ilé ló lọ tàràrà.*

Translation:

Lead: Mother/Father has gone home.

Chorus: She/he has gone home straightaway.

Lead: Mother/Father has gone home.

Chorus: She/he has gone home straightaway.[38]

The above song is rendered immediately after the burial since the journey of the dead is believed to start then. The rites of burial are performed in the proper way to ensure that the journey of the dead to heaven is not impeded. The song is expressing the fact that the children and relatives of the deceased have performed the specified rites correctly, there is the hope that the dead will travel to his home (heaven) smoothly.

That heaven is believed to be the permanent home of man is never in doubt. (Drewal & Drewal 1983:2). He continues to live as an ancestor for hundreds of years. He may be reborn as a child but his existence continues

in heaven. (Idowu 1962:194; 1973:187-188). It is with this in mind that the children of the deceased sing with joy of their father's (or mother's) departure for the real home - the afterlife. Since he was old, he has a place in heaven.

The Burial: There are two reasons why the burial of the old usually take place either in the morning or evening. First, it helps avoid the excessive heat of the afternoon as it is much more comfortable to dance when it is cool. Secondly, seeing the shadow of the *isọ̀gán* and that of the coffin on the ground is best avoided.[39]

From the heap of laterite (*ilẹ̀pa*) dug up from the grave, the wives each throw a handful of soil on the coffin. Then all the children of the deceased, begining with the first child perform the same rite. The members of the *isọ̀gán* use spades to throw back the laterite into the grave until it is fully filled up. They make sure that all the laterite is put back into the grave.

With the burial over, drumming, singing and dancing starts all over again. Uninvited drumming bands also join the funeral train. The children of the deceased dance round the streets and houses of their relatives.

THE CELEBRATION OF THE SECOND/ FINAL FUNERAL.

This consists of the feasting of members of the lineage, neighbours, in-laws, friends, relatives; members of the societies, guilds and associations to which the dead belonged and those to which the children, wives and siblings of the dead belong. On the last day of the final funeral which is referred to as the Sàràà, guests may be entertained , but the most important aspect is the distribution of cooked food to neighbours in the area.

Professor Peter Morton-Williams calls this final funeral ceremony "the second burial ceremony". (1960a:36). This may be because the final funeral is usually celebrated weeks, months or even years after the burial; the exact date depends on the consensus reached at the meeting held immediately after the death of the old, or in the meeting held a few days after the burial.[40]

Shortly before the funeral, cut-off samples of a chosen cloth will be passed round the members of the lineage, relatives and friends. These clothes will be sewn into dresses worn at the funeral as uniforms. It is referred to in Ile-Ife as *aṣọ ẹbí*, which means "the dress worn by blood relations". (Eades 1980:61 & Pemberton

1989:144). Sometimes, the photograph and names of the deceased are printed on the clothes at the textile factory. The quality and cost of the clothes depend on the size and wealth of the children and close relatives of the dead.

Food is cooked for the funeral by all those who prepared and presented food to guests at the burial. Pina-Cabral interprets the stress on food at funerals as "means of denying death and stressing the life of those who remain behind". (1986:223). Among the Yoruba, it is generally accepted that food is offered as atonement on behalf of the dead and is also a way of protecting the living from death. (Ryan 1978:268). A number of relatives who did not prepare food at the burial try to cook and give out food to relatives and friends at the funeral for a period of one or two days depending on their closeness to the deceased. The funeral takes place over three days - Friday (evening), Saturday and Sunday. This is to give civil servants and other educated people the chance to join in the celebration.

Weeks or months before the funeral, the members of the societies, guilds and associations to which the dead belonged are informed of the date of the funeral of their dead associate. The wives, children and siblings of the

deceased also inform their own friends, members of the societies, guilds and associations to which they belong. Most of these societies are organized like social clubs. (Bascom 1944:65-66; Eades 1980:61).

Apart from food and drinks presented to members of these associations, some of them also receive large amounts of money from the bereaved. This makes the expenses at such funerals considerable. (Lucas 1948:227 & Ryan 1978:266). In-laws of the deceased and of his/her children are also informed of the date of the funeral. We see that funerals are big affairs in Ile-Ife.

The members of such associations express thanks to the celebrants for their generousity and pray that their deceased parent will support them.[41] Gifts of money are given to the celebrants by the members of the guild, either individually or collectively. If the last method is adopted, each member of a guild contributes about five *naira* (N5) each. When two or three children of the deceased gave food to them, the money will be divided between them.

Relatives and friends are also given food and drinks by the celebrants. Gifts of money ranging from five to twenty *naira* (N5 to N20) are also given individually by the relatives and friends to each celebrant they visit at

the funeral. The basis of the gifts will be discussed below.

Food is continuously cooked throughout the day on Saturday. Guests turn up throughout the day until the evening. Meanwhile, drumming, singing and dancing continue on the streets.

The Wake: The wake is referred to as *aisùn*. This means "the act of not sleeping", (Parrinder 1972:44), or "without sleep". (Drewal & Drewal 1983:11). It is so named because there is no sleep for celebrants and their guests on Saturday night.[42] The wake usually starts at about ten o'clock in the evening and ends in the morning at about five o'clock. The wake ensures the smooth transition of the dead from the world to the afterlife.[43]

For the wake, the children of the deceased print special invitation cards with which they invite friends and other well-wishers. One or more musical orchestras are invited. The venue for the celebration may be the front of the deceased's house or on a school playing field close by. Chairs and tables are arranged there in the evening and elecricians are invited to help illuminate the venue.

Food and assorted drinks are served to guests. (H.W. Turner 1967:253). The orchestra play their music from night until the early hours of the morning. The celebrating children of the deceased, their spouses and relatives are requested to dance. For this, special songs are rendered for them by the orchestras. Friends and well-wishers use the opportunity to shower them with money. The guests may also participate in the dancing.

Since the wake is conducted with great noise, it serves the same purpose as the orchestras who played during the day at the burial. It enhances the communication between the world of men and the spirit world. The music also keeps the kin of the dead awake and serves as a good way of seeing off the spirit of the departed to heaven. It also gives the children of the deceased a sense of satisfaction that they have celebrated the funeral of their parent in a grand fashion.

Sunday: The last day of the final funeral ceremony called the "day of *sàráà*". In the context of the ceremony, it signifies that the food and drinks are provided as sacrifice to the ancestors and the deceased person.

On this day, all the events above (with the exception of the wake) are repeated but entirely

different guests turn up. The celebrants may receive a few of his Saturday's guests if they belonged to some other "societies" or associations which have been booked to visit the celebrants on this day.

When a person belongs to more than one association, he is under the obligation to visit the bereaved on the number of times on which his different associations visit the celebrants. He is also obliged to contribute money to give to the celebrants on each of the visits. Neighbours of the deceased are offered food and drinks by the celebrants on this day.

Gifts and Countergifts at Funerals in Ile-Ife.

Gifts given to people at funerals may be either monetary or material. When it is material, one or more of a range of items may be given to the bereaved. It may be a basket of okro (*hibiscus esculentis*), pepper, tomatoes, a tin of palm oil, a bag of salt, a goat or in rare cases, a cow. The amount of money or the worth of the material gift given to the bereaved depends on the level of relationship between the presenter and the bereaved: the closer the relationship, the greater the amount of gift involved.

Other factors which determine the size of the gift include the consideration of the gift received from the dead during his/her lifetime; the worth of gifts received from the bereaved by the guest before that time and the present position or the status of the bereaved in the Civil Service or manufacturing sector.

If the dead had been a generous giver of gifts during his lifetime and various people have benefitted from his largesse, the receiver makes every effort to repay his kindness by giving gifts of money and material to his widows and children. In a similar way, if the bereaved had given lots of gifts to some people either at childnaming ceremonies or funerals celebrated by them (the latter), those people try to repay the gesture by giving gifts of money to the bereaved at his/her time of need. This is the countergift.

Also a highly-placed government official or a business tycoon is likely to receive lots of gifts from people when celebrating the funeral of his/her parent because the presenters of the gifts expect to receive good favours, such as award of government contracts, access to cheap goods *etc*, from him/her. The gifts given to such a person for these reasons serve as investment. A similar system operates in Alto-Minho where all favours

including visits, gifts and presence at Masses are returned. (Pina-Cabral 1986:225).

Apart from the above reason, gifts are given to people as a token of friendship and love. The exchange of gifts in such instances is meant to strengthen the existing friendship between the giver and the receiver. A gift is also given to the bereaved to help him or her with the funeral expenses. Most important of all, it is believed that all the monetary gifts that a person gives to others will be received intact by the giver in heaven. For this reason, people give generous gifts of money to the bereaved. This has been described by Mauss as the religious reason for giving gifts. (Douglas 1990:ix).

There are two ways of giving gifts to the bereaved. Gifts may be personal or collective. Personal gifts are given to the bereaved directly by the giver or indirectly through a messenger. The collective is given collectively to the bereaved by members of a group. The response of the bereaved is to thank the givers of the gifts and pray that the givers too will survive their old parents. It is customary for the bereaved, after the funeral, to go round the homes of the givers thanking them for their presence at the funeral and for their gifts. Failure to

do this is considered as a sign of ingratitude by the Ifẹ and by all Yoruba.

Gifts are regarded as debts by the Ifẹ because they have to be paid back. Every good gesture must be reciprocated. This is also true of the North American potlatch system of exchange which has the same principles with that of the Ife: that all gifts must be returned and that this "sets up a perpetual cycle of exchange". (Douglas 1990:viii).

But occasionally, a countergift is not given back for various reasons: unemployment, loss of income, financial hardship *etc.* When the bereaved expects countergifts from certain people and he/she does not receive them, the bereaved becomes disaffected with those people. There develops in the person, the feeling of suppressed anger. The bereaved feels that he has been cheated by such people. Incidents like these may lead to quarrels between the aggrieved party and the culprits. But the aggrieved is careful not to mention that those people have not offered countergifts to him/her. The main complaint will be that they have not paid visits to him/her at the celebration of his/her parent's funeral; and if they were present but did not give out gifts, the complaint will be that they did not render any help to

him/her. The aggrieved person will make sure that such people do not receive any more gifts from him/her.

In most cases, the bereaved do not react in this manner if that was the first time that those people have not given countergifts. The second or third time is generally more appropriate. This is the emotional aspect and people tend to avoid this situation by promptly giving away countergifts. (Douglas, in Mauss 1990:ix). This cycle of gift exchange thus has two aspects: "..the obligation to reciprocate presents received, the obligation to give presents and on the other hand to receive them". (Mauss 1990:13).

The single greatest amount of gift is usually given to a person (in the case of a bereaved woman who was a wife, sister, daughter or any other close relative of the dead) by her lover. It is not unusual for a man to have a married woman as a mistress. He is under the obligation to support her financially at the funeral. It is because of this support that a significant number of women in Ile-Ifẹ have gone out of their way to find themselves ideal lovers. Although this is not openly approved of, it is nevertheless practised.

In the traditional society, a man usually takes much more care of his mistress than his wife. It is thus not

unusual for a man to buy a cow for his mistress to use for the funeral. A sum of money is also given to the mistress by the man. With this, she buys some other items. The man also invites some of his friends to the funeral. These friends contribute a specified sum of money and present this to the mistress.

In-laws also give generous gifts to the bereaved at funerals. If the father of a young married man dies, the son's in-laws will present a gift of four hundred and twenty *naira* (N420) to him.[44] But if it is at the funeral of the wife's parent, the husband and his relatives are directly responsible for all the expenses of the funeral. They also contribute money to give to the woman.

There is the idea of the bad or the inappropriate gift. Firstly, gifts of three items are never given as gifts to people; for example, three oranges or three *naira* (N3) are not given out as gifts, although one can give one, two, four, five, six *etc* of these and other things. This arises from the root or etymology of the word, which is *ẹ̀ta*. It is formed by adding the vowel *ẹ* to *ta*. *Ta* has many meanings and usage. Two of the meanings are "stung" and "pierce". In one usage, it can be used with *òṣì* (poverty). Thus to say that *òṣì ta*

lágbájá, means "poverty afflicts so-and-so". Also when the vowel *"ọ"* is added to the word *ta*, it becomes *ọ̀tá*, which means "enemy". Because of these meanings and connotations, three items, especially money such as three *naira* (N3) is regarded as a bad gift.[45]

Secondly, a gift may be regarded as bad, if for example, it is insignificant when one considers the status of the giver. Thus, if a wealthy man gives a gift of five *naira* to a close relative celebrating a funeral, it is regarded as bad.

The gifts given at funerals are connected with the dead in that it is believed that the eventual beneficiaries of the monetary gifts given to the bereaved are the givers themselves when in heaven. Material gifts such as animals, peppers, okro, palm oil, fish, onions, vegetables, salt, *gaàrí* (grated cassava flour), *èlùbọ́* (yam flour), and tubers of yam given to the bereaved by in-laws, relatives, friends and sympathizers are believed to be sent to the givers' parents and grandparents in heaven. Giving material gifts to the bereaved at funerals is thus regarded by the Ifẹ as a means of sending different materials to one's dead parents in heaven. This explains the reason why people

make the effort to give out material gifts to the bereaved at funerals.[46]

The bereaved can also send material gifts to their parents by preparing and giving out food to people at the funeral. It is those food items which they bought with their personal money which reach their parents in heaven; the other items are claimed by the givers' parents.

The Tomb and the Gravestone:

The tomb is known as *iboji* or *sàréè*. If the dead was buried at home, there is usually no need to mark the grave as it could easily be identified. A mat is laid on the grave to protect the dead from the elements. The children of the deceased are responsible for the erection of the gravestone.

The gravestone is seen as important because it shields the dead from the elements directly. It is also useful because it marks the spot where the deceased lays, the offspring do not miss the grave when they pour libations or consult with their parents. Most importantly, it is a site of remembrance. Seeing the gravestone makes people remember the occupant of the grave. This explains why gravestones are not erected for children, infants and even young men. To erect

gravestones for them will make people, especially the parents who outlive them to see those gravestones everyday and remember their dead children with pain, grief and a great sense of loss. Instead of grieving for a brief period, the parents may thus grieve until they die. Gravestones are thus only erected for adults.

Whereas the Merina of Madagascar (Bloch 1971:112-3; Huntington 1973:65) have magnificent, common ancestral tombs, those of the Yoruba, just like those of their Western neighbours, the Ashanti (Rattray 1954:162) are separate and made for individuals.[47] The Yoruba do not bury more than one body per grave. While the Merina spend a lot of money on building a tomb, the Yoruba usually make a modest tomb and gravestone for the dead.

About six months after burial, the bricklayer is invited. A design of the gravestone is described to him. Together with an apprentice, the bricklayer dig out the laterite used to cover the coffin. They stop only when they can see the clothes used to wrap the dead (the coffin made of wood would have decomposed). They then use a combination of cement mixed with sand and water; stones and cement blocks to fill up the grave. The gravestone is then erected and made to stand above the grave. Sometimes it is about two feet high, three feet wide and six feet

in length. Perforated or decorative blocks may be used to decorate the edges of the grave. The photograph of the deceased may also be used to adorn the gravestone. Others yet may build a small roofed shelter to cover the tomb from the elements.

The type of tomb built depends on the wishes of the dead and on the financial standing of the children. It is usual for people to adhere rigidly to the wishes of the dead. In this respect, if the deceased had asked for a big tomb, it is built by his children. We should note that such "expensive" requests are made by parents who knew that their children are wealthy. The tomb is regarded as the resting place of the dead, where his soul lingers and can be contacted. At the same time however, the deceased is believed to have gone to the afterlife.

Commemoration: The usual festival in which the deceased used to participate during his lifetime is continued by his children as a mark of commemoration of their parent. For example, if the deceased used to participate actively in the celebration of *Ọlọ́jọ́* festival (in honour of *Ògún* divinity) as a smith, the children make it a point of duty to hold a feast in memory of their father during the annual festival.

The children of the dead also often fix a particular date, which may change annually to celebrate the commemoration of their parent. (Ọlatunji 1975:79). This they refer to as "the festival of my father/mother". Relatives and friends are invited. A goat is usually slaughtered and a big feast is held. This is celebrated to serve three purposes.

First, it is a way of sending food and drinks to one's parent in heaven as it is believed that the essence of the food and drinks goes to heaven where it is consumed by the deceased. There was a similar practice in ancient Egypt but there the offering had to be taken to the tomb regularly. (Spencer 1982:54).

Secondly, it is celebrated to help the children of the deceased in their different undertakings in the world. It is believed that they can only make progress when their parent is pleased with them. The dead can only be pleased if he or she is not hungry or thirsty.

The wealthy place "In Memoriam" advertisements in national newspapers every year, in remembrance of their parents. These advertisements always have photographs of the dead, their dates of birth and death and the present titles of the children and where they currently reside. (Doi 1984:47; Ryan 1978:269; Lawuyi 1991:247-263).

The *Egúngún* Cult: The last route through which the dead is commemorated is through the *egúngún* masquerade. The *egungun* is also referred to as "heavenly beings". (Ọlajubu & Ojo 1977:253). Shortly after the funeral, the *egúngún* of the dead may be brought out. It is then considered as an ancestral spirit, in this case, the spirit of the recently dead person. (Abraham 1958:151 and McClelland 1982:36). These types of *egúngún* connected with funerals are the "ritual or ancestral masquerades". (Ọlajubu & Ojo, *ibid*).

On the day of the celebration, the *egúngún* mask , *agọ̀*, is worn by the *egúngún* who will come out from the deceased's house fully dressed up and regarded as the deceased person. (Willett 1967:29-30). There is the belief that the spirit of the dead actually alights on the masquerader (*egúngún*) during the ceremony. (Beier 1956a:383-4; McClelland, *ibid*). Plenty of food and drinks are provided by the children and kin of the dead. These include *ọ̀ọ̀lẹ̀* (a special beans delicacy), palm wine and much beer. Sacrifices are also offered to the dead at their graves by their children and prayers are said. (Shiltz 1978:50).

The *egúngún* is not brought out for women. (Morton-Williams 1960a:37; Maclean 1974:57 and Tonkin 1983:163). It is only in lineages where the cult has its roots that the dead are commemorated in this way. In Ife, many lineages do not celebrate *egúngún* festival and do not commemorate their dead in this way. It is celebrated for instance at Arubidi in Ifẹ. The Yoruba find it difficult to accept that death has such a great power over man. The benefit of the rite in this respect, cannot be over-emphasized. Lawal puts it clearly:

"..In the image of the *egúngún*, the Yoruba celebrate triumph of the human spirit over Death". (1977:58).[48]

Inheritance of Properties and Wives.

The Yoruba use the words *jẹ ogún* to express the idea that a person "inherits certain properties of the dead". *Jẹ* means "inherit", while *ogún* means "properties". (Lloyd 1959:20). Before the properties can be shared among the children and wives of the deceased (if a man), the debts of the deceased has to be paid to his creditors. The children and siblings of the dead are responsible for paying the debts. But if the children are young and are still in school, the responsibility then devolves on the siblings of the dead.

There are rules concerning the inheritance of the properties and wives of the deceased. The most important rule of inheritance is that the older sibling shall not inherit the properties of the younger one. (Morton-Williams 1960a:34; Lloyd 1959:19 & Fadipe 1970:143).

The second rule is that anyone who refuses to help defray the debts of the dead or those who fail to participate in the celebration of the funeral are not entitled to inherit from the properties of the dead or the wives. (Fadipe 1970:140 & Lloyd 1959:16).

Thirdly, anyone who fails to help care for the deceased, if sick before death, loses his or her rights to properties and wives of the dead. (Lloyd *ibid,* 16).

Finally, the wishes of the dead should be respected on how he wanted the properties to be shared. It is believed that if the wishes of the deceased is not respected, he may come back to worry the people responsible for the disobedience. (Lloyd 1959:18).

Properties, wives and titles are passed from a generation to another patrilineally, in most cases. But if there are no surviving children or sibling of the dead, properties may be inherited by matrilateral kin of the dead. (Schwab 1955:371). A large amount of properties are not given to a person who cannot manage the

properties sensibly for fear of his or her ruining it. (Ọlatunji 1975:84). When properties pass from one generation to another, it does so "to maintain a status". (Lloyd 1959:19). This is the reason why people ensure that it is not ruined by those who inherit it.

(a) Properties: The children of the deceased are the ones who can inherit the properties (Fadipe 1970:316), although a few items are offered to the siblings of the dead. In the past, the siblings of the dead had to be satisfied with sufficient properties. (Fadipe 1970:140; Eades 1980:55). That is no more the case. In modern times, the siblings of the dead may not receive any share at all.

There are about five to six elders of the lineage who are nominated to help divide up the properties. Occasionally, the dead might have nominated, during his life, about one or two trustworthy people to play these roles. The usual practice is for the deceased to have spelled out shortly before death, how he wanted his properties to be shared out. (Bascom 1969b:47). Those nominated are also compelled by him to swear to an oath that they will abide by his wishes.[49] His nominees convene a meeting with the deceased's family and a few elders in the lineage some weeks after the burial. His

siblings sit in as observers. But all these arrangements are made when the deceased was a man. The properties of a woman are inherited by her children although some items may be given to her siblings. The distribution of the properties of a woman is not a big affair and the children may be able to do this among themselves.

On the day a man's properties are to be divided, the elders appointed pray at the start of the ceremony, for the repose of the soul of the dead. Apart from the rules of inheritance stated above, they also follow certain regulations and they are as follows. Any property given out as gift by the deceased during his lifetime is set aside but there must be witnesses to corroborate the event. The properties to be divided should ideally belong to the deceased alone. In this respect, properties and farmlands which belongs to the deceased and his siblings jointly are not to be shared by the children.

Properties which the deceased own jointly and severally with siblings revert to the siblings, not to the deceased's children. (Fadipe 1970:140; Lloyd 1959:19 & 23; Eades 1980:55). If the deceased has inherited properties from siblings, the children of such people also become beneficiaries from the deceased. They usually

inherit some of the deceased's properties, although this may be in a token form. (Lloyd 1959:20). When the children of the deceased agree to give out part of their father's properties to brothers and sisters of the deceased, they expect to inherit from them too.

Many marriages among the Yoruba, especially in Ile-Ife, are polygynous, with the man having two or more wives at the same time. (Lloyd 1963:36). The principle devised and used for the sharing of properties is referred to as *ìdí igi*, which means "the tree system". Here, each woman is likened to a living fruit-bearing tree such as the orange tree. It is possible for a tree to have ten fruits while another tree may have just five. Another yet may have one hundred. The properties of the deceased are therefore divided according to the number of women who have had children for the man. (Lloyd 1959:22).[50]

This is done irrespective of the fact that the wife might be living with the husband at the time of death or whether she divorced him several years earlier. Some of the women might have been his mistresses or casual friends.[51] The children born to the last group of women have rights to his properties if they participated and contributed to the funeral. (Lloyd 1959:16 & 1955:241).

When all the properties have been divided into the appropriate number of stirpes, the children of each woman collectively pick up a portion, with the eldest child picking up a portion first on behalf of his/her siblings. Each portion is then divided among the children of each woman. Thus, if a woman has six children, they will divide their portion into six equal parts. On the other hand, if a woman has just one child, the child alone inherits a whole portion. It is not unusual to see a particular child of the deceased inherit a farmland measuring several hectares while another child may inherit just a few square metres. Money and rooms in houses are also divided up in this way.

Wills are used by only a small number of people, and these are limited to some of the highly educated. There are two reasons why wills are not popular.[52] First, the Ifẹ people do not generally want "outsiders" or "strangers" (such as lawyers) to know about the size and worth of their wealth and properties for fear of improper disclosure. Secondly, parents do not want to offend some of their children who may resent them because of the size and worth of properties bequeathed to them.

Widow Inheritance: This will be discussed extensively in a later chapter.

Succession to Headships of Families and Lineages.

At the death of a man, his first son succeeds to the headship of the family. (Fadipe 1970:135; Lloyd 1959:23; Eades 1980:55). The younger brother of the deceased inherits his status among his siblings. (Lloyd, *ibid*, 21). Once the first son becomes the head of the family, he enjoys the singular advantage of inheriting the dead's sitting room and bedroom. This is to ensure that the new head of the family resides patrilocally, so as to be able to direct the affairs of the family from this base. (Eades 1980:48; Buckley 1985b:167; Lloyd *ibid*). He also becomes responsible for maintaining order and discipline in his father's house.

The responsibility of his late father devolves on him: in the payment of school fees of the other children; purchase of limited number of books; help with finding jobs; and most importantly, participating in the celebration of the funerals of close relatives. In this connection, he ensures that burial shrouds are promptly donated by him (on behalf of his father's children) for the burial of relatives. The other children also

participate by contributing an agreed sum of money to meet the cost of the shroud and the funeral feast. It is also his responsibility to organize the annual commemoration of their late father. (Lloyd, *ibid*; Fadipe 1970:135).

If the deceased was a member of the Reformed *Ògbóni* Fraternity (R.O.F.), the first son who succeeded to the headship of the family is usually invited by the members of the cult to replace his father. He is then initiated as a member of the cult. In other societies and associations where the deceased was a member, this same son and other children are invited to become members and thereby replace their father.[53]

The elders of the lineage customarily insist that other children should be given the opportunity to replace their father in these other associations. When a child replaces his father in these other associations, he or she also has the financial contribution and shares of his father transferred to his/her name. In the Co-operative Credit and Thrift Associations, these may run into hundreds or thousands of *naira*. The choice of the successors of the father in these associations may sometimes lead to quarrels when a large amount of money is involved. Deceased women who were members of these

societies and associations (including the R.O.F.) are also succeeded in this way by different children.

Succession to the headship of the lineage is based on age and patrilineal descent. (Lloyd 1959:24; Eades 1980:53; Fadipe 1970:105; Schwab 1955:371). If a man was the *baálé*, head of the lineage, his son will not succeed to the post. The oldest male member of the lineage becomes the new *baálé*. He may be from any of the families in the lineage. The function of the *baálé* include chairing the meetings of the lineage; maintainance of law and order in the lineage; settling quarrels; ensuring that the dead is given a befitting burial and, organizing ritual activities of the lineage.

The power to allocate communal lands and farmlands is also vested in the *baálé*. These responsibilities are assumed by the new *baálé*. (Eades 1980:53 & 54). There is no initiation ceremony because a man becomes the *baálé* by virtue of being a member of the lineage. Besides, it is not a position which necessitates his continuous performance of rituals. A ceremony of installation is however held.

At the death of the *ìyàálé* (head of the wives of male members of the lineage), another woman succeeds her. Whereas succession to the position of the *baale* is

determined by age, succession to the position of the *ìyàálé* is determined by the date of a woman's marriage into the lineage. (Fadipe 1970:114). The most senior woman in this respect succeeds the deceased woman. A ceremony of installation is also held. Any woman from any family in the lineage can become the *iyaale*.

The functions of the *ìyàálé* include chairing the meetings of the wives of the lineage; leading the women in the cleaning of the *àkòdì* (meeting-house); leading the celebration of the final rite of separation for a deceased wife; organizing help for members at funerals; maintaining order among the women and organizing the collection of *esusu* contribution.[54]

The Problems of the Practice of Succession.

Sometimes when a man has no son to succeed to the headship of the family, or when the son is too young, the deceased's daughter or sibling may act as the head of that family. When a sibling fills this position, there is always the likelihood that the estate of the deceased may be mismanaged. This is a frequent cause of quarrel between the particular sibling and and the deceased's wife and children. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of this particular problem.

Another problem connected with succession is that a son or daughter who have been invited to join cults or societies such as the R.O.F. may not be willing to replace the parent in such societies. The reason for this is that charismatic christianity is spreading fast in Ile-Ife, and a lot of young men and women are members. Members of such churches do not have much regard for these cults and consider joining them a rejection of Jesus Christ and all he stands for. When the deceased's position cannot be filled, members of such associations consider that as a loss of membership and influence.

Summary:

The celebration of the funeral of the old is a time of thanksgiving because the deceased is thought to have completed his lifespan on earth. People also rejoice because the deceased is survived by children and grandchildren who will give the deceased a decent funeral and inherit his properties.

The funeral of the old is always preceded by a meeting where the dates of the burial and the funeral are fixed. Traditional methods are used to preserve the remains until the burial. The death of the old is announced by *òkú wíwá*, "the process of looking for the

dead". It also serves as a means of rejoicing (by the children) at their surviving their parent.

Immediately a death is announced, sympathizers start to pay condolence visits to the bereaved family. They are offered some food and drink. They pray for the bereaved that good events will take place following the death of their parent. Traditional worshippers of the *orisa*, other ordinary people and Muslims are buried around the family compound. Christians may be buried in Church cemeteries, while some are also buried in the family compounds.

White clothes are used to bury the dead and these shroud are donated by the kin of the dead and sometimes, by friends. The brothers of the deceased usually pay for the coffin. The deceased is usually buried either in the morning or in the evening. There are plays at funerals when wives of male members of the lineage sing, clap and dance at the funeral. Drummers and orchestras are always invited for burials because drumming, singing and dancing are essential parts of the burial and the second funeral ceremonies in Ile-Ifẹ.

The body is viewed by members of the public after it has been displayed and the deceased's family assemble and talk to it. Food and drink are continuously provided for guests. The second funeral consists of the feasting of

members of the lineage, neighbours, in-laws, friends, relatives; members of the guilds and associations to which the dead belonged and those to which the children, wives and siblings of the dead belong. Funerals are celebrated on three consecutive days: Friday, Saturday and Sunday. The wake is always celebrated on Saturday night and it ensures the smooth transition of the dead from the world to the afterlife.

Gifts are given to people at funerals; gifts may be either monetary or material. The eventual beneficiaries of the monetary gifts given to the bereaved are the givers themselves when they get to heaven. But material gifts such as animals, peppers *etc*, given to the bereaved are believed to be sent to the givers' parents and grandparents in heaven.

The gravestone is seen as important because it shields the dead from the elements. It is also a place where the offspring can pour libations and consult with their parents. The dead is usually commemorated by having an *egúngún* masquerade brought out for him. The communal dead is also commemorated annually through the *egúngún* festival.

Properties of the dead are divided into the number of wives who have children for the deceased, with the

children of each woman collectively picking a portion. The first son of a deceased man succeeds to the headship of the family while the younger brother of the deceased inherits his status among his siblings. The children of the deceased also inherit his membership of associations, societies and secret societies.

The oldest man in the lineage succeeds to the position of the *Baale* at the death of the holder of the post while the most senior wife in the lineage succeeds to the position of the *Iyaale* at the death of the holder of the office.

Endnotes:

1. Confirmation is usually by the doctor at the hospital or by the family if the death took place at home.

2. The Kikuyi and the Masai also have a similar practice. They show their joy and happiness that the deceased has attained old age; they therefore accord him with a burial. For if he died in his or her youth, he or she would not be buried. (Middleton 1953:65).

3. *Èdì* festival is celebrated in remembrance of the Ife heroine, Mọrèmi Àjàsorò who helped the Ifẹ̀ in ancient times to defeat the Ìgbò people. See Beier 1956b:28.

[4]. According to Walsh (*ibid*), there are two opinions on the reason for the religious ban. The first was that the period of the festival is a time of sober reflection on the death of Mọ̀rẹ̀mi's son, who was sacrificed to Ẹ̀sìnmìnrìn stream to fulfil Moremi's vow on the victory of the Ifes over the Igbo. The second reason was that during the persistent raids of Ile-Ife by the Igbo, the Igbos' trips always took place when the Ifes were least prepared to defend themselves: whenever they were "feasting with palm wine and drumming". But on the day when the Ifẹ̀s defeated the Igbos, they did not drink and the drums were not beaten. The ban on drumming during the festival in modern times commemorates that event.

[5]. The burial of the old may even be postponed if the children are wealthy, in which case, the body will be preserved in the Ife State Hospital mortuary.

[6]. The ancestors of each lineage are buried in the different family compounds in the City of Ilé-Ifẹ̀. This explains why people want to be buried in the family compounds, around their houses. (Laitin 1986:110). Lan, writing on the Dande of Northern Zimbabwe, puts it clearly: "..the territory belongs to the chief's lineage because the ancestors *lived* in it...The consequence is that a strong emotional bond exists between individuals

and the territory of their ancestors. The desire to live there is equalled only by the desire to be buried there". (1985:20). See also Bloch 1989:172.

7. See also Ellis 1894:160.

8. Rendered for me by Chief 'Tunji Adeyẹfa on 10th August, 1990.

9. Maclean 1974:57; Parrinder 1976:98 and Willett 1967:26.

10. Personal communication, July 24, 1989 at Ile-Ifẹ.

11. Chief M.O. Fashọgbọn, *ibid.*

12. Chief M.A. Fabunmi, Personal communication, 10th August, 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ. See Awolalu (1979:55) for ways of preserving the body.

13. Informant: Mr. S. Adedini, Personal communication, on 4th July, 1989 at Ile-Ifẹ.

14. Informant: Mr. Adedini, 4th July,1989. See also Moore 1968:64. Sayings and songs like this point to the Yoruba belief that the lineage is eternal. (Drewal & Drewal 1983:60). The songs also emphasize the fact the deceased was not childless. Childlessness, as Field notes "blocks the line of reincarnation". (1961:197). See also Gerald Moore (1968:64) and Leighton *et al* (1963:47).

15. He is compared to the elephant because the elephant is regarded as a fascinating and powerful animal among

the Yoruba. (Drewal & Drewal 1983:59-61). See also Moore 1968:68. Whereas the Yoruba compare the deceased to an elephant, the Nnobis of Igboland compare a deceased man with a leopard. This, according to Amadiume, is to preserve "the fearful, punitive and protective image of the male". (1987:84).

16. Pa B. Ajayi, Personal communication, 4th August, 1989 at Ile-Ifẹ.

17. Ulli Beier (1970:63-66) in a funeral song he reproduced also compares a dead person with a fallen elephant: "Alas, the elephant has fallen".

18. Mrs. Iyabọ Adegoke, Personal communication, 21st August, 1989 at Ile-Ifẹ.

19. The advantage of giving out "refreshments" to people has been expressed by Ilesanmi (1982:111) : those who eat and drink will "normally shower blessings on the entertainers".

20. Mrs. Dorcas T. Adegoke, Personal communication, 12th June, 1989 at Ile-Ifẹ.

21. See Barber (1991:117-118) and Schwab (1955:354) on the importance of *oríkì* at funerals.

22. Mrs. Dorcas T. Adegoke, Personal communication, 26th June, 1989 at Ile-Ifẹ.

23. See also Awolalu 1980:30.

[24]. White is considered as a symbol of purity. Because it indicates the sacred, it is used largely for rituals.

[25]. To the Yoruba, red represents "danger, evil, and restlessness". (Abimbọla 1976:239; 1977:156; Babalọla 1989:165). The soul of the dead may become restless if red clothes are used to bury the dead.

[26]. See Bascom 1969a:238-241 and Abimbọla 1977:48-50.

[27]. Pa Braimọh Ajayi, Personal communication, 2nd July, 1989 at Ile-Ifẹ.

[28]. The number of shroud collected also depends on how popular the dead person was, as friends and well-wishers may also donate a roll each to bid the deceased farewell. Peel (1983:324) gives the example of one T. Adewọle of Okesha, Ilesha who died in 1967: the deceased was "so generous that 450 pieces of cloth...presented at his funeral".

[29]. Mrs. Iyabọ Adegoke, Personal communication, on 10th August, 1989 at Ile-Ifẹ.

[30]. See also Margaret Drewal (1992:42) for an interesting discussion of play at funerals.

[31]. What they remember when they talk in this way are "good memories left behind by a man". (Abimbọla 1975:417).

[32]. Offerings are regularly made to the ancestors at the graves to prevent this. (Awolalu 1980:31).

[33]. For a brief note on these associations, see Eades 1980:61.

[34]. In Ile-Ifẹ, the expenses associated with the funeral of the old is always considerable. But it is the reverse in Potamia, rural Greece where extravagant entertainment is engaged in by the bereaved for a tragic death. (Danforth 1982:22).

[35]. This belief can also be found in India. (Parry 1985:620-621).

[36]. These are all forms of sacrifices to the ancestors. (Awolalu 1970:27; 1973:85).

[37]. Huntington & Metcalf interpret Needham's idea more clearly. (1979:48-49).

[38]. Source: Late Mrs Bimpe Oyekalẹ, on 18th June, 1988 at Ile-Ifẹ.

[39]. Pa Braimọh Ajayi, Personal communication, July 6, 1989 at Ile-Ifẹ.

[40]. This "second/final funeral" is known as *òkú ṣíṣe*, "celebrating the funeral". It is hereby distinguished from the burial ceremony which is *ìsìnkú*, "the burial". In the rest of this chapter, "funeral" will be used to refer to the "second/final funeral ceremony".

[41]. Forde also notes that when a member of an association died among the Yako (of Eastern Nigeria), all the other members attend the funeral to say "farewell" to the deceased. (1962:102).

[42]. The wake is always celebrated on Saturday during the celebration of the final funeral even if the death had taken place weeks, months or years earlier.

[43]. Drewal & Drewal, *ibid.*

[44]. Informant: Mr Ọladimeji, Personal communication on 21st July, 1989 at Ile-Ifẹ.

[45]. Source: Pa Adekunle Adegoke, Personal communication, 10th August, 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ.

[46]. Wives of male members of the lineage contribute raw food materials and money and give these to co-wives or male members who are the celebrants. (Sudarkasa 1973:150-151).

[47]. Among the Rukuba of Benue-Plateau State in Nigeria, only about three graves are used repeatedly by each sub-clan, the bones having been exhumed after some time. (Muller 1976:262).

[48]. See also Awolalu 1980:35.

[49]. There is a similar practice among the Anuaks of East Africa. (Lienhardt 1970:284-287).

[50]. See also Eades 1980:55. This rule makes it a bit difficult for spouses to inherit properties directly from one another (Lloyd 1966b:566), although a few educated people turn to the Courts for help in such matters.

[51]. Illegitimacy, as Ilesanmi observes, is "not based on being born outside wedlock", it is rather based on the father acknowledging that a child is his. (1982:113).

[52]. Source: Twenty people of different social backgrounds in Ile-Ifẹ were interviewed on the use of wills. The interviews took place over many days between 1st August and 29th August, 1990.

[53]. Among the Yako of Eastern Nigeria, "associations" also invite a member of the family to join and replace the deceased member. (Forde 1962:93).

[54]. The *èsúsú* is "a fund to which a group of individuals make fixed contributions of money at fixed intervals; the total amount contributed by the entire group is assigned to each of the members in rotation". (Bascom 1952:63). See also Fadipe 1970:256-7.

CHAPTER 6.

THE BURIAL OF THE YOUNG.

The death of the young is always thought to be caused by witchcraft and sorcery.[1] (Morton-Williams 1960a:34; Talbot 1926:474; Drewal & Drewal 1983:49). The death of the young is seen as unnatural. The concept of the young among the Ife actually refers to the age ranges of adolescents to adults who are about forty-five years old. People refer to them as *ọ̀dọ́* or *èwe*, which means "the young", or "a young person".

The young is not supposed to die as he or she has not attained old age. (McClelland 1982:82). When a young person dies, it is referred to as *òkú ọ̀fọ̀*, or simply *ọ̀fọ̀*. Ellis (1894:160) translates *ọ̀fọ̀* as "unwashed" most probably because of the prohibitions on washing or bathing. The translation which we prefer however is "mournful death". In order words, the death of the young is accompanied with great mourning, sadness and lamentation. The mourners in this case may be the parents, wife or husband of the deceased. When a young person dies, people say of the parents: "a mournful, sorrowful death has inflicted them".[2]

The body is washed by the *ìsọ̀gán*, it is dressed up in white shroud. But this is not compulsory if the

deceased is less than twenty years old; in which case, he or she might be buried in an old white cloth. A coffin is used if the deceased is more than ten years old. The *isọ̀gán* also dig the grave, either in front of the parent's house, beside it or behind it.

If the deceased was a Christian, he may be buried in a church cemetery after a Christian service. In practice, a person below thirty years old is likely to be buried at home[3] rather than in the church cemetery. For young Muslims, the *imam* is invited and the burial service is conducted like that of an adult. But the dead is usually buried at home.

For the burial of the young in all these three religious traditions, there is no joyous singing, no beating of the drums, no feasting, no dancing. Rather, there is much weeping, wailing and crying. The wailing is to express grief but is also used "to attract attention". (Pina-Cabral 1986:219). The noise generated by these activities can be heard one mile away from the deceased's home. The full process of mourning will be described in Chapter 11.

The grave of the older child (the teenager) may be marked by a gravestone. Inscription on the tomb of a child is unusual but they can sometimes be written to

express the actual feelings of the parents. At Igbodo Street in Ile-Ife, the inscriptions on the tomb of a teenager who died sometime in the 1960s read: *"Ìkàdí ìsáàsùn, ibi owó run sí".*[4] This literally means "the bottom of the pot, where a lot of money has been wasted". The background to this is that the parents had strived, despite their poverty, to educate the deceased child; a lot of money had been spent on this. All now seemed to have gone down the drain because of his death.

There was no free primary school education at the time when he attended the school. He was also educated in a Secondary Modern School and a Secondary School which were also fee-paying. A large number of school-age children were not given any education at this time because of the general poverty of the parents and the high level of fees. The frustration of the parents was clearly expressed in the inscriptions which they wrote on their son's gravestone.

The death of a youth (*ọ̀dọ́*) is more deeply felt by the whole community than the death of a child because the youth is supposed to be in the prime of his/her life. The young person is normally buried in a proper grave either at home or in the church cemetery. The corpse is bathed and wrapped up in white shroud by the *ìsọ̀gán* who are also

responsible for digging the grave. There is no singing of songs; no feasting by the *isọ̀gán* and the sympathizers. That is to say that no funeral ceremonies are performed for children and young persons; the only necessary rite being that of burial. (Morton-Williams 1960a:34; Bascom 1969a:346; 1969b:65). But the grave of the young person is always marked by the building of a gravestone.

In a similar way, the death of the middle-aged is also a cause for great grief. Fifty years or thereabout is what the Ife people regard as middle-aged. The person is usually buried like the old but without drumming, dancing, feasting and singing. For the spouse(s) and parents, it is a sorrowful death which should be mourned. For the deceased's children, it is an occasion of sadness at the loss and a time of silent and solemn thanksgiving because they have survived the deceased. Twenty-one days is the usual period of confinement by both parents. Thereafter, the mother pays visits to sympathizers to thank them for their kindness and visits.

Inquests and Aftermath: The death of the young is sometimes followed by an inquest, especially when there are suspicions of the cause of death. (Lucas 1948:235). The word "inquest" here does not mean "a legal inquiry

into a case of sudden and unexpected death". (Chambers Universal Learners' Dictionary , 1985:373). Rather, it means a traditional inquiry conducted by the family of the dead which is basically dependent on the use of spiritual and divinatory means.[5] (Awolalu 1980:27; Ellis 1894:155).

An inquest may take place through the use of divination whereby an *Ifa* priest is charged with the responsibility of finding out the cause of death and the people responsible for the death. (Awolalu, *ibid;* Talbot 1926:475).[6] At the divination, a few members of the deceased's family are usually in attendance. The clients may inform the *babalawo* of the reason for their visit. The names of the deceased and that of his mother are said on a coin or currency note which is then given to the *babalawo*. The *babalawo* casts his *ọpẹlẹ* (divining chain) on his tray. He then recites the poem formed by the pattern made by the chain. He selects an appropriate poem. The *Ifa* priest then explains what he perceives to be the cause of death which is derived from the story contained in the chosen *Ifa* poem. This may be death through poisoning or death caused by witchcraft. The options are open-ended, but names of the suspects are never mentioned. Also contained in the recited poem are

prescribed sacrifices which the clients have to offer. The belief is that the correct performance of these will result in the death of the suspects or may cause the suspects to suffer loss of properties or even the death of the suspects' children. (Delano 1937:103-4).

An *abokusọ̀rọ̀*, literally "a person who speaks with the dead" (a medium) may also be commissioned to find out the cause of death from the deceased person itself.[7] The medium speaks with the deceased for a fee. He is likely to call upon the dead at the grave during the night. He is believed to ask from the dead the cause of his death and the people responsible for it. (This is possible because the dead is believed to have acquired a lot of power, not only to know about the events of the past and the future but also to see through time and space. We discussed this earlier on).

Since the medium's job is considered as a dangerous one, done at night at the side of the grave, the family of the dead are never present to witness the event. The family puts its trust in the medium and believe his story that he was at the side of the grave during the night. Whether he was really there nobody can ever know; for there is a belief which states that people who talk to the dead at the graveside when he (the dead) is

physically raised up for a few minutes or witness the dead being talked to after he has been raised up (in the fashion in which the witch at Endor raised Saul up), and are not themselves mediums, will eventually go mad.[8] Since people want to remain sane, nobody is prepared to witness the event at the graveside with the medium who has an antidote.

The medium then has to inform the family of the cause of death and the people responsible. He also outlines a possible method of avenging the death of the person. This may be through the invocation of the power of the dead. The dead is called upon to avenge its death by either causing grievous bodily harm to the culprits or by killing them outright. It is widely believed that the dead will do so within seven days.

In Ekiti, eastern Yorubaland, there are renowned spiritualists who call on the ancestral guardian soul of the dead. Because they are regarded as experts in this field, people from all over Yorubaland travel to Ekiti to consult them. The premise on which this consultation is based is the belief of the Yoruba that the ancestral guardian soul of both the living and the dead can be contacted if one knows how to do so. It is in this respect that the living usually travel to Ekiti to find

out the cause of a problem and the solution to it at the time of crisis. These specialists known as *eleledaa*, (which means "the owner of the mechanism for consulting the ancestral guardian soul") demand a fee for the consultation.

He may operate alone or in partnership with others. There is a room in which the *ẹlẹ́dàá*, ancestral guardian soul is contacted. The room is divided into two by a white dress. The practitioner and the clients sit or stand in the first half of the room. The practitioner asks for the dead person's name and his mother's name. He then calls the deceased's name aloud three times. After the third attempt, the voice of the deceased is heard from the other side of the curtain, answering to his name. The deceased is then questioned about the cause of death, how it happened and the people responsible. The deceased gives the information asked from him. If the relatives demand vengeance, the practitioner may then harm the deceased's soul with medicines with which he will kill the enemies responsible for the death.

It is impossible to verify if it was truly the deceased's voice that was heard on the other side of the curtain. Clients are not allowed to have a look. The process is based entirely on belief and trust. An

advantage which the family of the dead derive from this is that it assures them that action is being taken to avenge the death.

The prophets in some of the Independent African Churches in Ile-Ife are sometimes consulted by the relatives of the dead to find out the cause of death, the people responsible and the best course of action which they can follow to avenge the death. It is usual for the prophets to give a description of the person responsible and the method used to kill the victim. This may be either sorcery or witchcraft for example.

From the description given by the prophet, the relatives would have a fair idea of who it was. The relatives may then be asked to fast for a certain number of days and ask God, in prayer, for help in their bid to avenge the death. They may also be asked to give some money or a few dresses to beggars to facilitate the revenge.

When the death is sudden and a particular person is suspected of sorcery which has resulted in the death, such suspect is invited to a meeting of male members of the lineage. There, the charges are formally made against him by the family of the dead. If the suspect denies the charge, a glass of drinking water is usually provided. It

is then sprinkled with laterite (*ìlẹ̀pa*) dug from the grave of the deceased before burial. The suspect is then required to swear on the glass of water that if he caused the death of the deceased, he too should die within a period of seven to twenty-one days. It is believed that if the person was involved in the death of the deceased, he too will die before the end of that period.[9]

When a person dies with his or her eyes wide open, relatives believe that the death was definitely caused by the machinations of the enemy. They therefore do not need to consult anybody for help. After the body has been given a bath, the first spade of laterite to be dug from the grave is collected and kept in the house. From a burning fire made with firewood, a live coal (*ẹ̀yin iná*) is brought out and thrown into a bowl of water to extinguish it.

The coal, ground up, and a pinch of laterite are placed in the left palm of the dead if the deceased was a lady and the right palm of the dead if a man. A small amount of *osùn* (*Bixa Orellana*) is also put into the respective palm. The dead is then addressed as follows: "If a person is responsible for your death, take the person along with you; the smoke leaves as soon as the

live coal is extinguished. Appear to the person clearly and take him or her away".[10]

The person responsible for the death, according to belief, will be "extinguished" (killed) just like the live coal. This method of avenging the dead is known as *òkú ríró*. It means literally, "the arming of the dead". If the parents of the deceased really want the dead to avenge itself with a particular weapon, a knife for example, it is also placed in the palm of the dead. The materials used for the rite are removed from the palm of the dead shortly before the body is wrapped up for burial. This method is believed to be very effective.

Another way of avenging the death of a person is to commission a herbalist (*adáhunse*) to prepare medicine to harm or kill the person responsible for the death. The herbalist receives a fee from the family of the dead and uses a combination of sacrifices and medicinal preparations to achieve this aim.

When a death has just taken place, the parents of the deceased may promise to try and avenge the death. But after some weeks or months, the promise may not be fulfilled either because of financial or other pressing problems. They may therefore decide to leave the matter to God. In this way, they rely on the belief of the

Yoruba that God rewards all good deeds and punishes man for the bad ones.

Even when the matter is left for God, the suspect is generally avoided in the society. Close relatives of the dead keep the suspect at arms length and pick up quarrels with him or her at the slightest provocation or without even being provoked. This is a regular cause of disunity and hatred in the kin group. However, matters cannot be brought out in public because the laws of Nigeria do not recognize the belief that a person can be killed by either witchcraft or sorcery. There must be elements of proof for every allegation made. The hands of the relatives are thus tied as these allegations cannot be substantiated.

Summary:

The death of the young is thought to be unnatural because the young who dies has been cut off in his prime of life. The death is always thought to be caused by witchcraft and sorcery.

The body is buried by the *ìsọ̀gán* in the compound of the deceased parents. There is no joyous singing, no beating of drums, no dancing and no feasting as it is a "mournful" death. The grave of the older child may be

marked by a gravestone. The death of the middle-aged is also a "mournful" death. The person is also buried like the old but there is no feasting, singing and dancing.

When there are suspicions of the cause of death of the young, traditional inquests are held. The family of the dead may be required to perform certain sacrifices to avenge the death. There is the belief that the correct performance of these will result in the death of the suspects, the suspects' children or that the suspects may lose certain properties.

Occasionally, the deceased's parents may not try to avenge the death and may decide to leave the matter to God. But the suspects will be avoided in the society. They rely on the belief of the Yoruba that God, who rewards all good deeds and punishes man for the bad will punish the suspects.

In the next chapter, the burial rites of people killed by lightning; of the lame and the hunchbacks will be studied.

Endnotes:

1. The Lodagaa also see most deaths as "cases of homicide", caused by people. See Goody (1962:208-219) on the causes of death.

[2]. Late Madam Comfort Adéyọ́ọ́là Adegoke, Personal communication on 21st July, 1989 at Ile-Ifẹ.

[3]. This refers to anywhere in the compound - either at the front, back or side of the deceased own house or his father's house.

[4]. Informant: Mr Adeleke Adegoke, Àdàgbá Compound, Ile-Ifẹ; Personal communication, 5th May 1988.

[5]. Chief O. Fagbule, the Ọbadio, personal communication, 27th September, 1989.

[6]. The Tallensi also use divination to find out the cause of a death. (Fortes 1981:52). See also Goody (1962:209-210) on a similar practice among the LoDagaa. But among the Azande, Evans-Pritchard notes that the poison oracle is consulted to determine the person responsible for the death. (1973:236).

[7]. This is reminiscent of the witch at Endor who helped Saul raised up and consult Samuel. (I Samuel 28:7-25).

[8]. Late Chief M.A. Fabunmi, Personal communication at Ile-Ife, 10th August, 1989 at Ile-Ifẹ.

[9]. Chief 'Tunji Adeyẹfa, *Ifá* priest, Personal communication, 5th August, 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ.

[10]. Chief 'Tunji Adeyẹfa, Personal communication on 10th August, 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ.

Chapter 7.

BURIAL RITUALS FOR OTHER CATEGORIES OF DEATH.

In this chapter, the sacrificial rites undertaken by the priests of the divinities in Ile-Ifẹ in burying the bodies of people who die in mysterious circumstances will be examined. These are deaths by thunder and lightning; the burial of the hunchback and the lame.[1] Similar types of burial, for example, of those killed by fallen wall; self-hanging; small-pox *etc*, will not be discussed here because the same principles examined in this chapter also apply.

Traditionally, the different divinities are worshipped in certain lineages, and in most cases, there are shrines of those divinities in the compounds of the lineages.[2] Men are initiated into the cults of the divinities when they are prepared for it, at the right age, which is about thirty. A person is initiated into the cult of the divinity worshipped in his lineage but he may be initiated into the cults of other divinities if he wants to adopt their worship. (Drewal & Drewal 1990:247).[3]

Initiation into the cults of the divinities in Ile-Ifẹ is markedly different from the rites of initiation into adulthood which Victor Turner described extensively

in The Forest of Symbols (1967). When a person has been initiated into the cult of a divinity, he is said to have undergone the "rites of the day/afternoon" (*ṣe ọ̀sán*) and the "rites of the night" (*ṣe ò̀ru*). In other words, the initiate has been let into the secrets of the rites of day and the rites of the night performed in the worship of that divinity. He thus becomes qualified and competent to take part in the celebration of the secret and public rites of the day and private rites of the night performed in the interest of the public at large. (Verger 1963:16-19).

Whereas the rites of the day and night are meant to prepare a man for participation in the worship of a particular divinity in Ife, the rites of adulthood discussed by Turner only succeeds in preparing a person for the change into the status of an adult in Ndembu society.

The basic advantages of undertaking the rites of the day and night is that it involves the individual in the worship and adoration of the divinity. It is a means of revitalization of the worship of the divinity. Secondly, it serves as a bonding and unifying factor in the life of the lineage. Most importantly, the history of the lineage and its patron divinity; the rituals connected with the

worship of the divinity and the necessary rituals of death are passed in this way from one generation to another. Continuity of the beliefs and practices is therefore ensured in this way.

It is in connection with the burial of people who died in mysterious circumstances (mentioned above) that the priests and initiated members of the cults are involved. They are responsible for burying the following respective deceased people[4]:

Kind of Death	Priests Involved in the Burial
(i) Those killed by thunder and lightning; the hunch-back and the lame.	Ọbalúru, the Priest of Ọ̀ràmfẹ̀ and members of the Cult at Ìlóròmù.
(ii) Those killed by fallen wall.	Ọbadìo, the Priest of Odùduwà and members of the Cult at Ìdio.
(iii) Those killed by small-pox.	Jagun Ọbalúayé, the Priest of Sọ̀npọ̀nná and members of the Cult.

(iv) Those who hanged themselves.	Lókorẹ́, the Priest of Ọbamerì and members of the Cult at Lókorẹ́.
(v) Those who committed suicide by hitting their head on a stone/floor.	Àpatà, Priest of Ẹ̀sindálẹ̀ and members of the Cult at Ìta-Àpatà.
(vi) Pregnant women who become deceased.	Ọbalésù, the Priest of Ọbàtálá/Òrìṣànlá and members of the Cult.
(vii) A deceased Ifá priest/ *babaláwo*.	Members of the Ifá Cult.
(viii) A deceased member of the Reformed *Ògbóni* Fraternity. (R.O.F.).	Members of the R.O.F.

All these burials are undertaken only after a series of rites (secret, private and public) have been performed by the members of the cults. These rites are essentially known as *ẹ̀rọ̀*, propitiation; and *ẹ̀tùtù*, atonement, offering or sacrifice. We shall discuss the meaning of these presently.

The Notions of *Ero* and *Etutu*.

Ẹ̀rọ̀ is a propitiatory pomade made with the liquid inside the shell of a snail, water, palm oil, shea butter and some herbs.[5] (Awolalu 1979:165; Abiodun 1988:437-438; Abraham 1958:193). The pomade, *ẹ̀rọ̀* is rubbed all over the bodies of members of the cult before they leave their houses for the house of the deceased. Small pots of *ẹ̀rọ̀* are also taken to the deceased's house by members of the respective cults. The deceased's home is a polluted place.

They use these pots of pomade, *ẹ̀rọ̀*, to purify the home of the deceased and the corpse and restore the place to a pure state, a state of normalcy so that type of death does not take place there again. The *ẹ̀rọ̀* is therefore used to make the hard, difficult situation become soft and easy and protect members of the cult and the bereaved from the polluting effect of the death. For

this same purpose, large pots of infusion (*àgbo*) are prepared with various herbs, water, leaves and watery liquid from the shell of a snail. The members of the cult will have their bath with the infusion before leaving for the home of the deceased and after returning from there. Pots of infusion are also given to the family of the dead for the same purpose. This infusion also serves as a good part of the propitiation. The propitiatory pomade and the infusion given to the bereaved, when used, purify them; protect them from the polluting nature of the death, from the evil influences and attack of spirits (*ebúrú*) present at their home, the scene of death and the site of burial. It is one step further in ensuring that that type of death never takes place in the family again.

Ètùtù has been translated by Abraham as "atonement", "offering", or "sacrifice of atonement" which can be made to a divinity. (1958:168).[6] Propitiatory sacrifice is the second way of removing the causes of bad deaths. (Beattie, in Bourdillon and Fortes 1980:36; Awolalu 1979:152f; Pemberton 1977:24). It is also used to calm the anger of the divinities and purify the members of the cult and the family of the dead before and after the burials. (Awolalu 1970:31; 1973:85; Parrinder 1976:61). These sacrifices (*ètùtù*) almost always involve the

immolation of an animal, although other forms of sacrifice may also be used. This animal[7] is the symbol which mediates between the world of humans and that of the divinities. (Ray 1976:78). When the animals are killed, some of the blood is poured on the emblems or symbols of the divinities concerned by members of the cult. The blood is the life of the sacrificial animal and it is the item which is consumed by the divinities and other spiritual beings. (Awolalu 1972:105; 1979:177-8; Parrinder 1950b:21-22; 1976:88; Pemberton 1989:130).

The flesh of the victim is cut up, cooked and eaten by members of the cults. When the victim's blood is shed, the blood reinvigorates the divinity's power. This enables it to render the necessary help to its devotees. (Drewal & Drewal 1983:6).

But we now come to an important question: Why do members of the cults eat this animal victim and drink at these burials? The participation of the members of the various cults in the eating of the offered meat and food, and in the drinking of the offered palm-wine, beer *etc* are of certain ritual significance. It makes the divinities active in the minds of the devotees, and enhances belief and ritual participation. (Parrinder 1976:87).[8]

Other forms of propitiatory sacrifice performed at the various burials include the beating of metal gongs (*ẹ́gánrán*), clapping, singing of ritual songs, dancing, beating of drums, invocation by the priests, prayers offered for the bereaved and the feasting undertaken by members of the respective cults.[9]

We see therefore that *ẹ̀rọ̀*, propitiatory pomade is used by members of the cults and the bereaved during the burial of those who died in tragic circumstances to purify the home of the deceased, makes the difficult situation of tragic death become soft and easy and protect members of the cult and the bereaved from pollution. *Ẹ̀tùtù*, propitiatory sacrifice is also used to remove the causes of death, purify the individuals and the community and prevent a re-occurence of that type of death in the family. Only initiated members of the respective cults may take part in the burials.

The Burial of those killed by Thunder and Lightning.

When a person is killed by thunder and lightning, people in Ifẹ say that "it has dropped", that is the thunder-axe has dropped on someone. According to the Chief Priest of *Ọ̀ràmfẹ̀* divinity, Chief Ọbalúru, an unclean mind and action is the cause of death through

thunder and lightning.[10] The death of the person is thus viewed as punishment for his or her evil deeds. This is contrary to the thoughts of the Nuer of Southern Sudan who see the death as an "act of God". (Evans-Pritchard 1956:54). As for Ọ̀ràmfẹ̀, he is said to punish people for different sorts of evil deeds through this medium of lightning and he is believed to be very swift to punish for acts of thefts, robbery and fraud in Ifẹ̀ society.

Although everybody is sad at the tragic loss of a person through this medium, the priest and members of the Cult of Ọ̀ràmfẹ̀ are privately pleased at the death because of the financial benefits and feasts which the bereaved have to sponsor. The word used for the disposal of the body by members of the Cult is *kóo* which means "collect". The implication of the use of this word is that the members of the cult are not going to the home of the deceased only to pick up the body for burial, they are also going to gather much of the pollution in the air, neutralize them and drive away the spirits (*ebúrú*), who have massed up in the home of the deceased since the moment of death. This is a dangerous task and it explains the precaution taken by the use of the propitiatory pomade (*ẹ̀rọ̀*) and the sacrifices (*ètùtù*) which they offer at the burial. We should note that all the members of the

various cults use the same word *kóo*, "collect" for the rituals of the disposal of the body.

When the death takes place, the family of the dead person immediately send a messenger to inform the priest of *Ọ̀ràmfẹ̀*. The messenger is given a list of items and money demanded by the members of the cult. This list usually include: a six hundred *naira* fee (₦600); a bale of white clothes; kegs of palm-wine (*Ọ̀ràmfẹ̀* does not "drink" the wine from the raffia palm, *ọ̀gọ̀rọ̀*); plenty of food for the feast (many plates of pounded-yam, melon soup with plenty of meat); a live sheep; a live pigeon; a live cock and a live dog to be offered to the divinity. The relatives of the dead will provide all the materials contained in the list in addition to the six hundred *naira* (₦600) fee. The food specified in the list is provided for the members of the cult on the day of the burial.

It is the responsibility of members of the cult of *Ọ̀ràmfẹ̀* to prepare pots of *ẹ̀rọ̀* for their use and for the use of the family of the dead. They also take some of the pots of pomade to the site of death for their use. Shortly before they leave for the house of the dead, the members of the cult prepare the *ero* with the following materials: a set of new needles (*ọkinni*); brass needles;

shea butter; lots of snails; beads; arrows and some herbs which include *pèlétù* leaf. The pomade is prepared in new clay pots. With this pomade, the members of the cult wash their hands up to the elbows and their faces. They are then ready to see the corpse.

On arrival at the home of the deceased, they spray propitiatory pomade on floors of the compound and on the body. They then retire to a reception area where they are entertained with the kinds of food and drinks mentioned above. This is the time when the members of the *isogan* in the lineage of the dead person dig the grave at the back of the deceased's house.

When it becomes dark in the evening, say about 8.00 p.m., the members of the cult begin the celebration with the announcement of their presence and the warning that uninitiated people should not come near. This is done by shouting and saying the following in a loud voice: "Who is it that is looking at us? He looks in a flash and dies suddenly! The snail watched, its eyes became gummed up!".

With outsiders out of the way, *Ọbalóògùn* (a titled member of the Cult) cuts off the head of the corpse with a sharp knife. He proceeds with a few members of the cult following him to a place known as *Igbó Alápáàrà* on the outskirts of the city, just beyond *Èsinminrin* stream.[11]

Ọbalóogun and his followers must not look back when going with the head and when returning. If they look back, it is believed that they will see the deceased following them in a physical, bodily form. The deceased may even be demanding the return of his head!

The carrier of the head will be chanting incantations as they go along so as to ward off evil on their way. This spoken area of the rite aids the control of the task of the performance of sacrifice and it may be done "through speech....prayer and song". (Ray 1976:79).[12] On arrival at the forest, a small pit is dug and the head is placed in it. A lot of propitiatory pomade (*ẹrọ*) is poured on it and it is covered with soil. After its decomposition, the skull is removed and placed at the shrine of Ọràmfẹ̀ where it really belongs. It is thought that it belongs there because the deceased was killed by the divinity; the skull has attained some of the attributes of the divinity and so, it should be associated with the god. Secondly, tradition demands that the skulls of all those punished by Ọràmfẹ̀ must lie at his shrine. The skull has attained some importance.

While the head is being buried, metal gongs[13] are continuously been beaten by members of the cult at the home of the dead. The headless corpse is wrapped up by a

titled priest known as *Lọ́jàá Ìlóróṃ̀ù* and thereafter displayed. The priest of Ọ̀ràmfẹ̀ and members of the cult dance around the place singing the following lament:

"Asele èrí Ọ̀run,
Ológùn àrè,
Yèé mo wí,
Ọ̀ràmfẹ̀ gbọ́ o,
Ológùn àrè".

Translation:

"The Witness of Heaven, Asele,
The Stranger who owns me,
What I demand,
Ọ̀ràmfẹ̀, please accept,
The stranger who owns one".[14]

The priest and members of the cult pay homage to the corpse by kneeling in front of it and paying obeisance to it. They do this because the body is believed to have been touched by Oramfe at the moment of death. The body has thus acquired a divine status.

The stone-celt believed to have been used by the divinity to kill the victim at the time when thunder and

lightning struck is removed from the site by the priest of Oramfe. It is believed that Oramfe kills by hurling this stone at the victim.[15] The priest keeps this stone-celt in his house. The dancing continues until late at night. Members of the family of the dead and relatives give gifts of money to the dancing priests and members of the cult as a token of appreciation. The body is thereafter buried in the grave by members of the cult.

The next day is devoted to the performance of sacrifice to ensure that the divinity is successfully placated. Very early in the day, the dog[16] is slaughtered in the forest of *Inúrin*[17] by the priest of Ọ̀rà̀mfẹ̀ and placed on the shrine of the divinity of iron (*Ògún*) in the forest. The pigeon[18] and sheep[19] are slaughtered at the shrine of Ọ̀rà̀mfẹ̀ and the blood dripped on the emblem of Ọ̀rà̀mfẹ̀ divinity. The pigeon is left in the shrine of Ọ̀rà̀mfẹ̀ while the sheep is removed by the members of the cult for cutting and cooking. The cock[20] is slaughtered and the blood is dripped on the emblem of the trickster divinity[21] of Ọ̀rà̀mfẹ̀ (*Ẹ̀ṣù Ọ̀rà̀mfẹ̀*); the cock is also removed for cutting and cooking but the pigeon is left at the shrine of Ọ̀rà̀mfẹ̀ as it is not edible.

At the home of the dead, the members of the cult pray for the family that that type of death will not take

place among them again. The bereaved replied "*àṣẹ*" which means "may it be so". The wives of male members of the priest's lineage also assemble at the home of the deceased. There, they beat big calabashes, dance and receive gifts of money from the kin of the dead. Lots of food and drinks are also presented to them. All the members of the cult of Oramfe retire to the home of the Chief Priest at Ìlóròmù that afternoon where they eat fried bean cakes (*àkàrà*) brought there that day by the family of the dead. They also relax with the drinking of palm-wine presented with the cakes. The burial fee and other gifts of money are then shared among all the titled priests in the cult.

Although the members of the cult openly prayed for the bereaved family that Oramfe will not strike anyone among them again, an interesting problem later develops. If Ọ̀ràmfè does not kill anyone in the community again, where will the priests receive all the largesse mentioned above? In the words of the Obaluru, the priest of Oramfe, his booty comes once in a while with his participation in these burials. But such deaths are so few and do not take place so often. Ọbalúru gave the lightning-conductor designed by "white men" and installed on the roofs of houses as the reason why the deaths do not take place

regularly. In his opinion, once the gadget is installed on the roof of a house, it becomes almost impossible for thunder and lightning to penetrate such houses. The last incident of death through thunder and lightning happened in 1979. In a wish to activate the occurrence in the community, the titled members of the cult pray privately as follows after the sharing of money: "*àpàyí pàmínrìn o!*" which means "as he (Ọ̀ràmfẹ̀) killed this one, may he also kill another!".

As a follow-up to these rites, the family of the dead may celebrate the funeral and it is celebrated just like any other funeral in the society. But there is the obligation on the family of the dead to find a volunteer among them who will be chosen as the *Lọ́jàá*, a titled devotee of Ọ̀ràmfẹ̀. The family is also obliged to participate in the annual celebration of the festival of Ọ̀ràmfẹ̀.

Burial Rites of the Hunchback and the Lame:

The hunchback is known as *abuké*. It means "the one who has a hunch". The priest of Ọ̀ràmfẹ̀ and members of the cult are responsible for the burial of the hunchback and

the lame. Hence the Ifẹ̀ saying: "the hunchback and the lame end up at Ilọ́rọ́mù"; (*abuké ayarọ, Ilọ́rọ́mù lọ́ nrè*). Ilọ́rọ́mù, being the residential compounds of the members of the Cult of Ọ̀ràmfẹ̀.

The hunchback and the lame are referred to as *ẹni òrìṣà*, "the person of the divinity". Idowu (1962:72) translates this as "the votaries of the *òrìṣà*". Food restrictions are imposed upon these two classes of people while they are alive.

It is believed that it was *Ọbàtálá* who used clay to mould humans at the time of creation and that he made the hunchback, the cripple and the albino with their deformities. (Farrow 1926:43; Beier 1955:23; Idowu 1962:21 & 71; Pemberton 1977:12; 1989:124). The matter seems to be clear. Although Ọbàtálá might have created a few people out of "displeasure" or desire to inflict punishment (Abraham 1958:502; Pemberton 1989:128), a large number of people were created with defect out of mistake following his intoxication with palm-wine. (McClelland 1982:12; and Lawal 1974:243). It was partly because of Ọ̀ràmfẹ̀'s role as a peacemaker during the quarrel of *Odùduwà* and *Ọbàtálá*[22] that Ọ̀ràmfẹ̀ has been commissioned with the task of burying the hunchback and the lame by Ọbàtálá.

After serious reflection on the miseries he had caused by the creation of the hunchback and the lame, Ọbàtálá did not want to be bothered with their burial again since seeing them with their disabilities will bring the bad memories of his mistake and foolishness back to him. It was for this same reason that Ọbàtálá renounced the drinking of palm-wine since it was the wine which was identified as the cause of his mistake. All these explain why it is the priest of Oramfe rather than the priest of Ọbàtálá who has been charged with the responsibility of burying the hunchback and the lame.

The Burial of the Hunchback: When the hunchback dies, the priest of Ọ̀rámfẹ̀, Chief Ọbalúru is informed and invited to the house of the deceased. Essentially the same rites performed for the burial of a person killed by thunder and lightning are performed but there are some differences. Firstly, the corpse is treated in a different way. A titled priest in the Cult of Ọ̀rámfẹ̀ known as *Ọba Elésí* ("the king whose task is to remove") removes the hunch at the back of the deceased with a small sharp axe.[23] He takes it to the shrine of Ọ̀rámfẹ̀ and when it becomes dried, it may be kept in the house of Ọbalúru. The corpse is buried without the hunch in a

grave already dug by members of the *isọgán* of the deceased's lineage. Members of the Ọràmfẹ̀ cult are responsible for wrapping up the body in a white shroud and burying it at night, amidst the beating of gongs (*ẹgánrán*), dancing and singing a song of lamentation. The second difference is that the family of the dead are not charged an exorbitant fee this time, but they nevertheless pay a substantial sum of money.

Areas of similarity include the elaborate feasting, participation of the wives of the lineage of the priest, the removal of a part of the body and its placement in the shrine of Ọràmfẹ̀ divinity, the use of propitiatory pomade by members of the cult and the bereaved, the performance of all the sacrifices with those animals mentioned above and the sharing of the meat, this time, in the house of the priest, Chief Ọbalúru.

The greatest point of divergence, however, is the particularity of the song of lamentation which they sing this time. It is as follows:

"Abuké, arọ o,
Abuké sẹ̀hìn gelete".

Translation:

"The hunchback, the lame,

The hunchback has a massive back".[24]

Prayers are also offered for the family by members of the Cult saying that they will not have any occurrence of such disability in their family again. This is one of the reasons why such elaborate rites are performed.

The Burial of the Lame: *Aro* is the Yoruba word for the "lame" or "crippled". The same rites are performed for the lame but no part of the body is removed. That song rendered at the burial of the hunchback is also the main ritual song. The performance of the rites ensures that the family will not thereafter give birth to deformed babies.

The Uses of the Skulls and the Hunchs:

When the elders of Ìlóròmù want to find out the truth of a matter (in a dispute, for example) between two or more parties, they may ask the two parties to swear to an oath. A keg of fresh palm-wine and a few kola nuts are provided. The whole group move to the shrine of Oramfe where the kola nuts are split and passed round; the palm-

wine is poured into clean, dry skulls of people killed by thunder and lightning. The opposing parties swear to an oath, eat the kola nuts and drink the wine. It is believed that those who swear falsely will be killed by Ọ̀ràmfẹ̀.

As for the dried hunch, it is used by the Yoruba for the preparation of "money-inducing" medicines. There is the belief that certain medicines can help anybody who uses it to come across a large amount of money, and thereby become wealthy. There are so many recipes for these medicines. The hunch is used in some of the recipes.

Although the priest of Ọ̀ràmfẹ̀ keeps all the hunchs and insists that he has never used any of them for this purpose, he however admits that people still come to him with offers of large sums of money, pressing him to exchange one of the hunchs for money. He has rejected all these tempting offers so far. But as he says, he could easily deceive those people by offering them dried bones from a cow!. But as at August 1990, he has not done so.

The second use of the hunch is its use as an *aale* on the farm. An *àà̀lè* is "a protective-charm on article for sale; tree, *etc* to prevent it being taken by another person, who should he take it, is supposed to be

overtaken by calamity". (Abraham 1958:51). The calamity may range from serious skin diseases to giving birth to a deformed child or even to death by thunder and lightning. When the hunch is used as an *àà̀lè*, people avoid stealing the objects on which it is hung and even totally avoid stealing from the farm on which it is found. The hunch is thus very effective as an *àà̀lè*.

<u>Summary</u>:

When a person is initiated into the Cult of the divinity worshipped in his lineage, he becomes qualified and competent to take part in the celebration of various secret rites. These rites include the burial rites performed for the *ẹ̀ni òrìsà* and people killed in mysterious circumstances such as death by lightning, falling wall, *etc.* The priests of the different divinities lead the performance of these rites of burial. The rites performed are known as *ẹ̀rọ̀*, "propitiation", and *ètùtù*, "atonement, offering or sacrifice".

The propitiatory pomade and the infusion given to the bereaved, when used, purify them and protect them from the polluting nature of the death. It also ensures that that type of death never takes place in the family

again. The offering of propitiatory sacrifice is the second way of removing the causes of bad deaths.

The members of the Ọ̀ràmfẹ̀ Cult are responsible for the burial of those killed by lightning. The body is buried after lots of propitiatory pomade has been poured on it. The burial of the hunchback and the lame by members of the same Cult also consists of the offering of sacrifices, the use of propitiatory pomade, the rendering of sacred songs and the chanting of incantations. Prayers are also said for the family by members of the Cult, that such disability will not afflict them again.

The dry skulls of people killed by lightning are used by members of the Ìlóròmù to swear to oaths. It is believed that those who swear falsely will be killed by Ọ̀ràmfẹ̀ divinity. The dry hunch is used by the Yoruba for the preparation of "money-inducing" medicines. The hunch is also used as an *aale* to prevent thieves from stealing crops on the farms.

The next chapter will be devoted to the study of women's death rituals.

Endnotes:

[1]. The hunchbacks, the lame and the albino are known as *ẹni òrìṣà* (Abimbola 1973b:77), (that is "people who belong to Obatala divinity") and are "sacred to him" (Ọbatala). Stevens (1966:187) notes that they are "seen as a warning of his ability to drastically alter his original design for the physical features of man". Up till the late 1960s, the *ẹni orisas'* needs are provided for by the worshippers of Ọbàtálá divinity.

[2]. The main shrines of some of the divinities are located elsewhere in the city and not in the compound of certain lineages. An example is the main shrine of *Ògún* divinity, located at Ẹnuwá, in the centre of the city. Small shrines for the divinity are, however located in the compounds of some lineages. For a list of shrines and their location in Ile-Ifẹ, see Fabunmi (1969a).

[3]. See Gleason (1992:4) for an interesting discussion of the same subject.

[4]. My informants were the Priests of the various divinities in Ile-Ifẹ. The data for this table were collected at various dates in 1989 between July and October at Ile-Ifẹ.

[5]. But why are these and some other ingredients used? The liquid from the "large edible snail" (Buckley

1985b:212) is used as an ingredient because it is believed to "soften life" and free people from danger. (Awolalu 1973:87). It represents "peace and coolness". (Babalọla 1989:165 & Buckley 1985b:213). Water is used because it has soothing properties (Abiọdun 1988:437); it is also used to make "concoctions of leaves and herbs". (Adewale 1986:30). Palm oil is an *ẹ̀rọ̀* itself and this explains why it is used.(Lawal 1974:248). It is also a material preferred by mystically powerful women such as witches (Gleason 1992:45) who can influence the result of the rituals. Shea butter (*òrí*) is used as one of the ingredients because of its soothing, "calming" properties. (Gleason 1992:45).

6. See also Drewal & Drewal (1983:14 & 248) and Awolalu (1979:152f) for further discussion of *ètùtù*.

7. The animal offered differs from one divinity to another. The choice of the animal depends on two factors: "convention" (what is usually offered according to tradition) and "oracle" (what divination prescribes at a particular time). (Awolalu 1973:86).

8. See also Meyer Fortes 1980:xvi.

9. The Drewals also confirm that these activities can be classified as forms of sacrifice. (1983:6).

10. Hence, Gluckman notes that in many societies, "natural misfortunes are explained by derelictions from duty". (1962:50).

11. *Igbó Àlápàárà* here means "the forest of the owner of thunder and lightning". It is implied that Ọ̀ràmfẹ̀ divinity owns this forest.

12. See also the same view expressed by Ray on power of ritual words among the Dogon: "...it is not the offerings or sacrifices but the power of ritual words that initially arouses the gods and disposes them to partake of the oblations and thereby to transmit their saving powers to men". (1973:32).

13. These metal gongs (*ẹ́wọ́* or *ẹ́gánrán*) have been described as "worn-out hoe-blades" "struck together in pairs". (Fagg & Willett 1960:29). They are beaten to produce sacred music. A goat is slaughtered "and its blood shed on the ground" on any occasion when the music is played. (Fabunmi 1985:98).

14. Priest of Ọ̀ràmfẹ̀, Personal communication, 14th August, 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ. Songs such as this, Ray observes, helps "to coerce" the divinities "to respond in the desired manner". (1973:29).

15. Informant: The Obaluru, the Priest of Ọramfẹ, Personal communication, 5th August, 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ.

16. Dog is Ògún's favourite meat. (Farrow 1926:52; Awolalu 1973:86).

17. *Inúrin* means "the owner of iron". This is an indirect reference to the divinity of iron, *Ògún Lákáayé, Ọ̀sìn Mọlẹ̀*, commonly known by his shortened name *Ògún*.

18. The pigeon connotes "good luck and longevity" (Awolalu 1973:87), and prosperity. (Drewal & Drewal 1990:116-117).

19. Sheep is Ọ̀ràmfẹ̀'s favourite animal. (Priest of Oramfe, Personal communication on 20th August, 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ).

20. Èṣù is said to like cock. (Priest of Oramfe, Personal communication on 20th August, 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ). Èṣù is believed to be present here as "there is a change in transition". (Wescott 1962:337).

21. Some divinities have their own special trickster divinities. An example is Oramfe here, who has *Èṣù Ọ̀ràmfẹ̀* as his own. Another example is Ọbàmerì divinity who has *Èṣù Ọbagìndìn* as his trickster divinity. These trickster divinities are sent on regular errands by their owners.

22. See Fasọgbọn (1985:2 & 17) for notes on the quarrel and allusions to efforts to settle it.

23. The hunch is removed so that the person will not be reborn in another lifetime as a hunchback. (Personal

communication, Priest of Oramfe, 19th August, 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ). The Anlo of West Africa also perform this type of "surgical ritual" on the hunchback at death. (Gaba 1987:182 & 195).

[24]. Priest of Ọramfẹ, Personal communication at Ile-Ifẹ on 22nd August, 1990.

CHAPTER 8.

WOMEN'S RITUALS AND DEATH

This chapter is devoted to the study of the rites performed by women for a deceased woman. It also sets out other rites performed by women who have recently been exposed to the trauma of the death of their husbands.

Three major rites shall be discussed in this chapter and they are as follows.

(1) "*Ẹ́kún-ò́wúrọ̀*" or "*Ì́ba Orogún*" : This is a rite performed for a deceased woman by the association of wives of male members of the lineage. It is a mandatory rite.

(2) "*Ì́fárí Opó*": It is a rite celebrated by widows to finally separate them from their deceased husbands. It is also a compulsory rite.

(3) "*Ì́ba Pípe*": A social rite usually celebrated by most women who are involved in the celebration of the final funeral ceremony of their old parents, husbands and close relatives. The prerequisite for the celebration of the rite is that the deceased whose funeral is being celebrated must have been old and should have been ripe for death at the time of her death. This rite is therefore not celebrated by women at the funeral of a person who was not acknowledged as being old at the time

of death. Further, the rite is not a compulsory one and so not all women perform the rite.

We shall begin our discussion of these rites by an examination of the first rite known as *"ẹ́kún-ò́wúrọ̀"* or *"ì́ba orogún"*.

The Rite of *Ekun-owuro/Iba Orogun:*

R.C. Abraham (1958:185) gives "weeping; crying" as the English words for *"ẹ́kún"*; and "early morning", (1958:3) as the English words for *"à́árọ̀"* or *"ò́wúrọ̀"*. The name *"ẹ́kún-ò́wúrọ̀"* thus literally means "mourning by way of weeping during the morning". The reference to weeping here is to the practice of early morning weeping undertaken by women mourners at the house of the bereaved on the first few days which follow a death. Weeping and wailing is most intense in the morning because the Yoruba reckon that important tasks should be undertaken in the morning. Early-morning weeping is important because it shows that the sympathizers really felt the loss of the deceased and go all the way to show that they share the sentiments of the bereaved.

The same rite *"ẹ́kún-ò́wúrọ̀"* is also called *"ì́ba orogún"*. Literally, the name *"ì́ba orogún"* means "hiding or shielding oneself and other co-wives". It refers to

the rite which is exclusively performed by co-wives of the lineage for one of their members who has died. It is usually celebrated shortly after death or at the funeral celebration.

Although men may participate by financial assistance, provision of materials, food, drinks and by dancing at the celebration, men's participation ends there. "*Ìba Orogún*" is essentially women's ritual, performed only by them, with men edged out of active participation.[1]

The word "*ìba*" also means in Ifẹ dialect of Yoruba language, "a special feast". Such special feasts are celebrated by members of associations, clubs, societies and guilds usually known as "*ẹgbẹ́*". A member of such an association has the right to invite all other members to a feast only once in a year or once in a two-year period. This rule gives other members the opportunity of inviting all members to such feasts. Occasions to which a member may invite other members to a special feast include childnaming, marriage, "housewarming" and funeral ceremonies. A detailed study of this will be made towards the end of this chapter. But the important fact is that the rite of *"ìba orogún"* also means "a special feast held by co-wives in honour of the deceased woman".

Indeed, the rite is among other things, a big feast greatly enjoyed by the co-wives of the lineage.

We now see that while the name "*ẹ́kún ọ̀wúrọ̀*" ("weeping in the morning") tends to emphasize the wailing, lamentation and sober nature of the first few days after death, the name "*iba orogun*" actually stresses the exclusiveness and festive mood of the rite. Both names refer to the same rite.

Connecting Myth:

The following myth is from the *Ifá* corpus known as *Ọ̀bàrà Ọ̀bírí*, also known as *Ọ̀bàrà Ọ̀wọ́nrín*.[2] The setting was ancient Ifẹ, when *ẹ́kún ọ̀wúrọ̀* was first celebrated. A woman named Àkòkoọlá, the daughter of Afíbinrín consulted some diviners after seeing some bad signs. She was asked to offer a sacrifice and refrain from going anywhere for seven days. Before that period had ended, she undertook a journey to her husband's farm to look for kolanut (*cola acuminata*) which was one of the items for sacrifice. She met "heavenly spirits" on the way. They took her to heaven. Àkòkoọlá died.

Àkòkoọlá's friends and the wives of male members of her husband's lineage wept, mourned and lamented her death. They used all the sacrificial items which she has

bought to prepare a feast in her honour. The women also used the calabash as a musical instrument, by beating it to the accompaniment of music. They expressed their feeling that the celebration was a befitting rite for Àkòkoọlá and that when they became old and died, such a rite should be performed for them as part of their final funeral rites. Since then, it has been celebrated as the most essential rite performed for deceased women at funerals in Ile-Ifẹ. The full story and the translation is as follows:

Ṣẹ́kẹ́ṣẹkẹ̀ lọ́rùn ẹsin,
Àbàjà kò yẹ ọrùn ọmọ èniyàn,
Ó dífá fún Àkòkoọlá ọmọ Afìbirìn,
Ó ńsùnsùn kunsùn,
Ó ńlálàá kálàá.
Ó bá tọ àwọn ṣẹ́kẹ́ṣẹkẹ̀ lọ́rùn ẹsin lọ
Wọ́n jẹ́ ọmọ awo lẹ́hìn Òrúnmìlà
Ṣẹ́kẹ́ṣẹkẹ̀ lọ́rùn ẹsin
Àbàjà ko yẹ ọrùn ọmọ èniyàn
Ó dífá fún Àkòkoọlá ọmọ Afìbirìn
Wọ́n ní kó ṣètùtù
Kó má bàa rógun ikú àìròtẹ́lẹ̀.
Ó ní kín ni kí òhun se ?
Wọ́n ní kèrègbè nìkan lẹbọ rẹ̀

Àwo ẹfọ́ mẹ́rin
Ọ̀ṣùn, ègúnmọ̀, tẹ̀tẹ̀, Ṣokọ,
Àráàbá iyán mẹ́wàá,
Ọtín ṣẹ̀kẹ̀tẹ́ mẹ́wàá,
Igba àkàrà, itan etu, itan agbàlàsà (àgbùnrín).
Wọ́n ní kò gbọdọ̀ lọ síbi kankan
Títí tí ó fi máa ṣe o.
Ó ra gbogbo rẹ̀ pátá
Ó wá ku obì.
Ó ní òun ńlọ múu lóko ọkọ òun,
Wọ́n ní kó máse jáde,
Ó ní kí òun nawọ́ móbì ni.
Ọ̀nà ló gbé pàdé àwọn ẹbúrú
Tí a ńpè ní ẹgbẹ́ òrun.
Olórí ẹgbẹ́ ni nílé ayé
Wọ́n sì ńfẹ́ẹ́ lọ́run.
Wọ́n bá fi ọwọ́ bọ́ọ́ lójú
Ó bá àwọn ẹbúrú lọ,
Tí a ńpè ní ẹgbẹ́ òrun.
Bí Àkókóọlá ṣe kú niyẹn.
Bí ó ṣe kú, wọ́n bá gbée wálé
Gbogbo àwọn ẹgbẹ́ rẹ̀ bẹ̀rẹ̀ sí dárò
Wọ́n ńsunkún.
Gbogbo nǹkan ètùtù wá nílé,

Àwọn ẹgbẹ́ rẹ̀ ní kí wọn da erèé sómi
Wọ́n bá fi dín àkàrà
Wọ́n bá gbé ẹ̀kọ kalẹ̀
Wọn fi ẹran àti itan agbàlàsà jẹẹ
Wọ́n mu ẹmu,
Wọ́n bá táwọ́ sí kèrègbè
Tí wọ́n fẹ́ mú lọ sílé babaláwo
Wọ́n ńlùú koko koko
Wọ́n bá kọrin kan pé :
"Kabi kò kú o,
Àkòkoọlá Afibirìn
Kabi kò kú o,
Àkòkoọlá Afibirìn
Kabi ẹ kò okú o,
Àkòkoọlá Afibirìn".
Wọ́n tún kọ òmíràn :
"À ńwá a,
A ò rii,
Àkókóọlá lọ sísàlẹ̀
Ó ńsará Òrun.
À ńwá a,
A ò rii,
Àkòkoọlá lọ sísàlẹ̀,
Ó ńsará Òrun".

Translation :

"Cuffs on the neck of the horse,"

"Àbàjà face-marks are not fitting on the neck

Of a human being,"

Performed *Ifá* divination for Àkòkoọlá

Daughter of Afíbirín

Who was sleeping badly

And was having terrible dreams.

She consulted "Cuffs on the neck of the horse"

"Àbàjà face-marks are not fitting on the neck

Of a human being"

Who were subordinates of Orunmila.

"Cuffs on the neck of the horse"

"*Àbàjà* face-marks are not fitting on the neck"

Performed Ifa divination for Àkòkoọlá

Daughter of Afíbirín

She was asked to perform a sacrifice

So as to avert sudden death.

She asked for the particular sacrifice

They specified the big calabash as the main item

Others included four cooked plates

Of different vegetables

Ọ̀ṣun, èègunmọ̀, tẹ̀tẹ̀ and ṣọkọ,

Ten big plates of pounded yam
Ten pots of corn beer (*ṣ̀ẹ̀k̀ẹ̀t́ẹ́*)
Two hundred balls of fried bean cakes (*àk̀àr̀à*)
A big chunk of *etu* meat (Maxwell's duiker)
A big chunk of *agb̀àl̀àṣ̀à* meat (antelope).
She was asked to stay at home
Until the sacrifice has been offered.
Àkokoọlá bought all the sacrificial items
With the exception of kolanuts.
She decided to travel to her husband's farm
To pick up some kola nuts.
She was again reminded to stay at home
But she insisted on going to the farm for the nuts
On the way to the farm,
She met some spirits (*ẹbúrú*)
Who are also known as "the company of heaven".
Àkokoọlá was the head of the society in the world
Those in heaven really wanted her to join them
They massaged her face with their palms
She went (in the spirit form) with the spirits
Who are known as the company of heaven
That was how Àkokoọlá died.
Her corpse was brought home
All her female associates

Cried and mourned her death

All the sacrificial items were still unused

Her associates suggested that they should process beans

Which they used to fry bean cakes (*àkàrà*)

They also provided maize gruel *(ẹ̀kọ)*

Which they ate with cooked meat bought by Àkòkọọlá

They drank palm-wine

And got hold of the calabash

Which Akokoola bought for the sacrifice

They started to beat it like a drum,

They rendered a lament as follows :

"Kabi did not die,

Àkòkọọlá Àfibirin

Where did you meet the dead ?

Àkòkọọlá Àfibirin".

They also sang a second lament as follows :

"We are searching for her

We cannot find her,

Akokọọlá went downward

And has become an inhabitant of heaven".

<u>Reasons for performing *Ẹ́kún Òwúrọ̀* :</u>

If the rite of *ẹ́kún òwúrọ̀* is not celebrated, the children of the deceased will not prosper. They may become unemployed; their children may fall sick; they may

suffer loss of properties; they may become involved in court cases and one of them may die. To prevent any of this from happening, the rite of *ẹ́kún ò̀wúrọ̀* is usually celebrated even if the final funeral ceremony has to be postponed for lack of money.

Occasionally, in the past, if the rite was not celebrated and if bad things such as those related happened to any of the deceased's offspring, word would spread in the locality that such suffering had arisen because of failure to render the necessary obligation to the dead. An example which readily comes to our mind was that of a seventy year old man whose mother died some fifty years ago. He was an only child who consequently failed to celebrate the *ẹ́kún ò̀wúrọ̀* for his late mother.[3] He has fallen on bad times. He had been indigent, his health had been poor and he had been involved in a lengthy court case, spanning over ten years. Relatives and neighbours pointed to the fact that all those troubles are the result of his non-performance of the rite and that as long as the rite remained uncelebrated, there was the possibility that his troubles might follow him to his grave.[4] A similar story may be found in Abimbola (1976:157-160).

The rite is also performed so that the deceased's children will be free to attend other funerals, especially those at which *ẹ́kún ọ̀wúrọ̀* rites are celebrated. A taboo prohibits them from attendance at such funerals until it has been performed. There is therefore some urgency and need to remove this obstacle to freedom to associate with people and participate in the festivities.

The last reason why *ẹ́kún ọ̀wúrọ̀* rite is celebrated is that it is regarded as a sort of sacrifice at which food and drinks are provided. In Yorubaland, a lot of sacrifices are those in which people are invited to eat and drink. (Parrinder 1976:87).

We now come to the question: Is there any mythical or divinatory basis which supports the belief that the rite must be compulsorily celebrated? From the *Ifá* corpus known as *Ọ̀wọ́nrín Bàrà* or *Ọ̀wọ́nrín Ráro*, we find the story of Alááàáyán whose mother died but refused to celebrate his mother's *ẹ́kún ọ̀wúrọ̀* rite.[5] He had different sorts of troubles. An Ifá priest, Àsìnmọdẹ̀hìn, asked him to prepare a feast for all the co-wives of his mother in his father's lineage. From the third day following the celebration, all his troubles began to disappear. As from that time, the celebration of the *ẹ́kún ọ̀wúrọ̀* rite became

a mandatory obligation. The full text of the story and its translation are as follows :

Àsinmọdẹ̀hìn ló dífá fún Alááàyán
Ọmọ Aṣoròfọ́kòkò-ẹgẹ́dẹ̀
Ìyá Alááàyán kú
Kò sunkún òórọ̀
Àwọn ẹlẹgbẹ́ ìyá kò jẹ́kí ìyá jẹun lóde ọ̀run
Ló bá sọ pé ọmọ òun
Kò sehun tó yẹ kó ṣe.
Wọ́n ba nǹkan Alááàyán jẹ́
Gbogbo rẹ̀ kò lójú mọ́
Alááàyán tọ àwọn Àsìnmọdẹ̀hìn lọ
Ohun tí òun ńṣe kó lè dáa.
Wọ́n ní ètùtù ni kó ṣe o.
Ó ní kín ni ètùtù ?
Wọ́n ní ewúrẹ́ méjì, kèrègbè mẹ́rin,
Àwò ẹ̀fọ́ mẹ́rin, ọ̀ṣùn, etí ẹ̀lẹ̀, ègùnmọ̀, òdú,
Ó rúbọ tán
Wọ́n fa ewúrẹ́ kan àti kèrègbè mẹ́ta fún un
Wọ́n ní kí ó lọ pa ewúrẹ́ náà fún
Àwọn obìnrin ilé ìyá rẹ̀.
Ó pa ewúrẹ́, ó gbọ̀bẹ̀ ẹ̀fọ́ fún wọn.
Wọ́n bẹ̀rẹ̀ sí lu kèrègbè ninú àkòdì

Wọ́n ń ṣe :

"Ibe é la sìn ọ́ mọ,

Àsìn mọ

Àsìnmọdèhìn".

Translation :

Àsìnmọdèhìn performed Ifá divination for Alááàyán

Son of Aṣoròfọ́kòkò-ègẹ́dẹ̀

The mother of Alááàyán died

He did not celebrate *ẹkún òwúrọ̀* rite

His mother's mates in the afterlife

Prevented her from sharing in their food.

She reckoned that her son

Did not perform the mandatory rite.

They began to destroy Alááàyán's properties

He had so many difficulties

Alááàyán consulted the diviners Asinmodehin

So that things may change for him

He was asked to offer sacrifice.

He asked for the particular sacrifice

They prescribed two goats, four big calabashes

Four plates of different vegetables

Ọ̀ṣùn, ẹtítẹ̀, ègùnmọ̀ and *òdú*

Alaaayan offered the sacrifice.

One goat and three calabashes were given to him
He was asked to slaughter and cook the goat
For the co-wives of his mother
He presented the meat and vegetable soup to them.
The women began to beat calabashes in the lineage hall
They sang :
"We have seen you off
And are returning here
The last farewell
Asinmọdẹhin".

The Aims of *Ẹkún Òwúrọ̀ :*

There are two main aims. Firstly, the rite is celebrated to effect a separation between the deceased and other women, her associates who are wives of male members of the lineage. With them, the deceased had taken care of the lineage's central hall (*àkòdì*) and had developed a meaningful relationship with all the other wives. A formal rite of separation which will lessen the impact of the loss is thus needed for this.

Secondly, the rite of *ẹkún òwúrọ̀* is celebrated as a rite of incorporation. It helps to ease the transition of the dead into the afterlife. In this respect, it serves as a propitiatory rite, *ètùtù*.

The Structure of the Participating Lineages:

Many lineages celebrate the rite of *ẹkún òwúrò*, but our example will be limited to the lineages in the Láfogído Ruling House in Ile-Ifẹ. There, seven lineages which are segments of an original one lineage participate actively in the celebration of the rite. Each lineage consists of several extended families, who all trace their ancestry to one great progenitor of the ruling house: Láfogído who was the tenth *Ọọ̀ni*, King of Ifẹ. They are therefore all related by blood. But it is the wives of the male members of the lineages who act as the ritual specialists.[6] The seven lineages are as follows :

(i). Àdàgbá.

(ii). Òtutù.

(iii). Lúgbadé.

(iv). Wúnmọníjẹ̀.

(v). Okiti.

(vi). Olúmobì.

(vii). Ilé Ọmọ.

Musical Instruments, Forms of Drumming and the Carrying of the *Àgèrè*

There are two main forms of drumming during the celebration of the *Ẹ́kún-ọ̀wúrọ̀* rite: the *kèrègbè* (calabash) set and the *àgèrè* drum set. Lineages which beat the calabash set include Lọ́wá Àdá, Lómùjó and Ejesì. The royal lineages beat the *àgèrè* drum set and they include Àdàgbá, Òtutù and Lúgbadé.

The *agere* drum set consists of two upright drums.[7] The first one is known as *àgèrè* and is regarded as the male drum while the second is known as *òrìṣàkirè* and is regarded as the female drum. These drums have long trunks and carved features like that of a human being: the nose, face and eyes. Apart from the two drums, there are also two rattle gourds (*ṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀*) which two women shake when the drums are beaten; and two metal gongs (*agogo*) which are beaten with sticks by two women.

The *àgèrè* drums, according to indigenous belief, have their own spirits which must be appeased. This is the reason behind the practice of depicting eyes, nose and mouths on them. They are kept in the house of the most senior wife of the lineage, the *ìyàálé*. A clay lamp filled with palm oil is lit in the room and is kept burning day and night. Light must shine on the drums in

the store, but not just any light. Bits of food are left at the foot of the drums regularly and libation is made to the drums intermittently. The drums also have to be appeased before they are moved to the ritual site; which is always either the home of the deceased or the lineage hall, *àkòdì*. *Agere* drums are also made for the use of hunters who beat the drums while chanting *ìjálá* poems. But they have their own drums made for them and do not use the women's drums.

The drums have to be transferred to the ritual site. This is known as *"kíkó àgèrè"*, which means "carrying the *àgère*". It is the responsibility of the celebrating segment of the lineage who are the hosts to select the women, usually two, for each drum, who will carry the two *àgère* on their heads and transport them to the ritual site. The criteria used for selecting the carriers will be discussed in Chapter 10. The carriers of drums cut off a big lump of pounded yam, put some soup on it and put it at the foot of the drums. A cup of palm wine and two lobes of kola nuts are also offered to the drums. One of them prays as follows[8]: "Today, we are to celebrate the *ẹ́kún òwúrọ̀* rite in honour of so-and-so (name of the deceased). Let her soul rest in peace. Make her children prosper. Let evil not perpetuate in her house. Those of

us who are taking part in the celebration, let us not fall into evil. We want to live on earth for a long time, let it be so. When it is our own time to die, let our children be financially fit to celebrate this rite for us.."[9] The women then eat the left-overs and proceed to carry the drums to the ritual site.

Some taboos must be observed when the drums are being transported by the women. Firstly, the carriers of the drums must not look back when the drums are on their heads. If they looked back, there is the belief that they would see the deceased person following them. They may become sick as a result.

Secondly, the women must not stumble or hit their toes on stones. These two actions are bad omens, among the Yoruba. (Lucas 1948:250; Bascom 1969b:73)). They signify that evil is lurking somewhere in front or that something bad will happen at the ritual site. Besides, the drums must not fall down on to the ground. If one does, it becomes desecrated and the bearer may be punished by the ancestors.

Thirdly, the same set of carriers who transport the drums to the ritual site must carry them back to the iyaale's house. It is an obligation which must be performed to please the ancestors.

Finally, the *agere* drums must always be returned to the *iyaale's* house for safe-keeping and storage. But why? The *iyàálé* is always an older woman of about seventy or in most cases, eighty years old. She has therefore attained menopause. She has to clean the drums and can thus not defile them; because in the words of the Ife, she "has become a man". It is also returned to her house because she has the time to spare to ensure that the lighted lamp does not go out. As she is old, she is most likely to have a reduced commercial interest which gives her time to stay at home for most of the time.

Audience and Occasion:

The first occasion at which these women[10] celebrate the *Ẹkún-òwúrọ̀* rite is, at the rite of separation for the deceased woman. It is the responsibility of the children of the deceased to present plenty of food and drinks to the women of the lineage who act as the ritual experts. When the singing begins, the children of the deceased have to dance to the music. Relatives paste money on their heads; these are gifts. They are obliged to give the money to the women who then share it at the end of the performance.

The second occasion at which these women perform their art is at the invitation of the king Ooni. The women usually beat the drums and sing various songs at the installation of chiefs in the king's palace. But they do not sing the songs reserved/meant for the dead at these performances. These performances are sacred ones too; for the ancestors of these royal lineages through these acts give their assent to the choice of the chiefs being installed. That is the reason why the King Ooni and the chiefs touch the drums before the commencement of the ceremony. The King Ọ̀ọ̀ni provides plenty of food and drinks to the women at these ceremonies. He also gives them gifts of money.

<u>The Feast :</u> The feast is one of the most important aspects of the *ẹ́kún-ò́wúrọ̀* rite because the food and drinks are not only presented to the women but also to the ancestors, the divinities worshipped in the lineages and to the divinity *Ẹ̀ṣù* and other spirits. Writing in 1866 in his Journal, the Rt. Rev. Samuel Ajayi Crowther speaks of a particular rite known as "tears of mourning". He notes that at the celebration of this rite "women of the compound have a communal meal, then beat calabashes as drums and dance together in honour of a female

deceased".[11] This shows that this rite was celebrated at the time of Crowther and that he had probably heard about it being performed in Ile-Ifẹ or elsewhere in Yorubaland. It also shows the importance of this feast which he described as "a communal meal". It is also interesting to see that a variant of the form of drumming used - the calabashes - is mentioned here by Crowther.

Considerable expenses are involved in the provision of these rites. It is therefore almost impossible for the children of the deceased to finance this exclusively by themselves. Close relatives such as father's siblings and their children voluntarily propose to buy, cook and present some of the drinks to the celebrants. We should note that the children of the dead woman have to reciprocate this gesture to the donors in their (the latter's) time of need. A big she-goat is usually slaughtered and cooked for the feast. This is usually the responsibility of the siblings of the husband of the deceased woman. But if the deceased woman had divorced the husband, the husband's siblings will not buy the goat. In the situation in which they were not formally divorced but were just separated, the siblings of the husband will buy the goat. This is especially true if the woman participated in the celebration of marriages,

funerals, chieftaincies and the cleaning of the lineage central hall. The husband's siblings are also responsible for the purchase of the goat if the woman did not pay back the dowry or go back to her father's house (*dálémosú*). This goat is called the "fare goat", that is *ẹran ìrèyà/ìrènà*. (Ọlatunji 1975:88). Literally, this means "the goat which makes the path or the journey of the dead becomes good and smooth". It serves a similar purpose as the "fare fowl", which the Yoruba call *adìyẹ ìrànà*. The goat is a sacrifice meant to pave the way for the journey of the dead from the world to the afterlife. Anybody who has had any sexual relationship with the deceased must not partake of meat from the goat. If he does, it is believed that he may lose his life: the deceased may call him up.

The food, drinks and items provided by the children of the deceased and close relatives are listed below:
(i). A big bowl of pounded yam, a plate of soup, a keg of palm wine and two kola nuts. From these, some food will be used to appease the drums before being carried; libation will be poured from the wine; the kola nuts will be split and cast in a simple form of divination to enquire whether to carry the drums and proceed with the celebration. This casting is continued until an

affirmative answer is received. It is called *obì dídà*, "the casting of kola nuts". This method has been described by Awolalu (1973:84; 1979:122).

(ii). Two hundred wraps of corn gruel, *eko* and four plates of *ọ̀ṣ̀ùn* and *èg̀ùnmọ̀* vegetable soup.

(iii). Sixty pieces of dried beef meat, cooked in soup.

(iv). Four plates of pounded yam.

(v). Ten big trays of pounded yam.

(vi). One gallon of palm oil. The Yoruba believe that palm oil, *epo*, is the item which makes the soup palatable. It is always used in the making of *ẹ̀rọ̀*, propitiatory pomade: it features here in that connection. (Awolalu 1973:83 & 86; Buckley 1985b:108).

(vii). Five tied-up bunches of kola nuts. This item is included as a sacrificial one. Most Yoruba sacrifices include the use of kola nuts. Awolalu (1973:86) confirms this.

(viii). Five kegs of palm wine.

(ix). Sixty balls of fried bean cakes (*àk̀àr̀à*).

(x). Two big chunks of *etu* meat.

(xi). Plenty of salt. This is also included as a sacrificial item. There is the implicit prayer that the life of the deceased's children will be "sweet" like salt. (Ilesanmi 1982:116).

When all the food and drinks are presented to the women, they do not eat until the ancestors have been offered their share. If this rite is celebrated in the central hall of the lineage, the food is put on the stump which represents the ancestors. But if it is celebrated outside the deceased's house, it is put outside for the ancestors. The offering consists of one tray of pounded yam, one plate of vegetable and meat. Libation is poured for them. Palm oil, sprinkled with salt and a wrap of corn gruel are put at the crossroad or the front of the house for *èṣù* divinity, the ancestors and other spirits. If these forces were not given their share of the food, the rite which is a sacrifice will not be efficacious.

Four women known as *ìríjú*, "those who share food" are responsible for sharing these food and drinks among the women. The process of food sharing is as follows. The food and the drinks are divided into seven, the number of the segments of the lineage present. Each portion is further divided among the women present from each segment. Corn gruel, *ẹ̀kọ*, is the first food to be shared; *ọ̀kà/àmàlà*, yam flour food is shared next; *iyán*, pounded yam is shared after that; *àkàrà*, fried bean cake and palm wine are shared last.

There is also an order in which the food is eaten. *Ẹ̀kọ*, solid corn gruel, is the first food to be eaten. The indigenous explanation is that it is believed in Ifẹ that *ẹ̀kọ* is "the way or path" which will enable the woman to pass to the "place where the dead are assembled". The local explanation here is loaded. The corn gruel is soft. It is eaten in this context as a sort of propitiation (*ẹ̀rọ̀*). This also explains the reason why it is used as an item of many Yoruba sacrifices.(Abimbọla 1976:36; Awolalu 1973:83). Just as *ẹ̀kọ* is soft, the journey of the dead to the afterlife will be easy. The eating of *ẹ̀kọ* will ease the passage of the deceased from the site of the rite to the afterlife. *Ọ̀kà*, yam flour food is eaten next. This is followed by the eating of *eba*, cassava food and pounded yam. Fried bean cakes, *àkàrà* is eaten last. Palm wine is drunk after this. Libation is poured on the ground at regular intervals.

<u>The Sitting Arrangement:</u> When seated, the women form a semi-circle. The older women sit on chairs or benches at the back. Two of them beat the drums with their palms.[12] They are selected on the basis of their seniority by marriage, known to everybody by heart. (Lloyd 1963:36). Those who beat the rattle gourds, *ṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀*, sit beside them

or in front of them. Their group is the next in terms of seniority. Their task is to shake the rattle and beat it with their hands. It must match the beat of the drums and accompany the songs.

Women who beat the metal gongs *(agogo* sit in front of those who beat the rattle gourds. They beat the gongs with sticks to the accompaniment of the drums, rattle gourds and songs. All the other women sit on mats on the floor. They are essentially the singers. They sing the refrain of the songs but it is the elders on the benches who lead the singing of the songs. We note a similar activity in Okuku, where such songs are sung at funerals by women who are either wives of male members of the lineage or relatives of the deceased. (Barber 1991:10,119 & 131).

The Rendering of the Songs: The children of the deceased are expected to dance to the songs rendered by the women.[13] But they do not dance to the first song, which when rendered is considered to be a lament, *orin arò̩*, and is believed to be danced to by the deceased and the ancestors of the lineage. Most of the songs are panegyric odes. (Finnegan 1977:12). Their themes are mainly about the heroic deeds of the ancestors and of the brave caring

men of the lineage. A few of the songs belong to the *ìjálá* musical genre normally sung by hunters at their meetings.

The first song which is a lament is rendered in a solemn mode. It is as follows:

(i). *À bọ̀bá la mọba,*
À bọ̀bá la mọ̀ba,
Jíjí la jí la bálà lọ́wọ́ o,
À bọ̀bá la mọ̀ba.
Ìwọ mọ̀ lolówó mi,
Mo bẹ̀rẹ̀ mọ́lẹ̀ o,
Ilá gùn ju oníre.

<u>Translation:</u>

We found them there on arrival
We found them there on arrival
We woke up and found lines
On our palms
We found them there on arrival
The devotee of the divinity
I belong to you
I bow down
To pay obeisance to you

The okro plant does not grow
Taller than the reaper.[14]

After singing each song, palm oil sprinkled with salt is passed round the women, who taste some of it. This is necessary as it is an antidote to any evil repercussion which may arise from the invocation of the spirit of the dead by the ritual songs. All those who are present there also taste the oil for the same reason. It is used here as propitiatory oil, *ẹ̀rọ̀*. Besides, the palm tree and its many products represent fertility,[15] death and rejuvenation and it is a good symbol of womanhood and productivity.

The second song is as follows:

(ii). *Àgufọn ò,*
Erin gòkè àlọ̀,
Àgufọn ò,
Erin gòkè àlọ̀,
Erin gòkè o,
Erin gòkè àlọ̀,
Àgùnfọn ò,
Erin gòkè àlọ̀.

Erin gòkè àlọ̀.

Translation:

By using one's accumulated energy to climb a hill,
One becomes very light thereafter,
The elephant has climbed the *àlọ̀* hill, (2ce).
The elephant has climbed,
It has climbed *àlọ̀* hill.
By using one's accumulated energy to climb a hill,
One becomes very light thereafter,
The elephant has climbed the *àlọ̀* hill.

The third song goes as follows:

(iii). *Alápásá ya pásá,*
Alábùdé yà bùdé,
Kọ́mọyékù ọkọ̀ mi,
Ọ̀gbẹ́gbẹ̀wá kì sílé,
Ó ní asọ wọlẹ̀ láàfin,
Ẹ kọ́mọyékù, o kú orò,

Wọlé o gbọ́mọ̀ mi kòmí o,
Ó tó bẹ́ẹ̀ ná ò.

Translation:

A person chooses her own weaving loom,
People choose their close associates,
Kọ́mọyékù, my husband,
He stuffs the house with plenty of money,
Complains that some of his clothes
Are missing at the palace.
Kọ́mọyékù, you perform the ritual well.
Kọ́mọyékù, my husband
He who has a farm nearby
Come into the house quickly
To give me my child
(Prepare me for conception)
It is time for this.

The fourth song goes as follows:

(iv). *Hẹ́ẹ̀pà o ! Hẹ́ẹ̀pà Orò !!*
Baba wá dé.

Translation:

Héèpà ! Héèpà, it is ritual time !!

Our fathers have arrived.

And the fifth song goes forth:

(v). *Èrò ọ̀nà,*

Ẹ wáá wòó,

Ẹ wá wo ntádàgbá nṣe ò.

Translation:

Passers-by and all around,

Come and look at,

The deeds of Àdàgbá.

And lastly, the sixth song;

(vi). **Lead:** *Bi mo bá ńgbọ́ pokí́ pokí́ lóko ẹgàn*

Refrain: *Àdàgbá ńgúnyán.*

Translation:

Lead: When I hear the sound of the wooden mortar,
In the virgin forest,
Refrain: Àdàgbá has organized the pounding of yam.

Many songs are actually rendered and the above six are just some relevant examples. While the singing is in progress, some of the women shout out the warning (obviously to strangers) : "This is *Jálá*, this is *Mọ̀sọ̀* ! Nobody sees the King Ọ̀ọ̀ni !!". This is to say explicitly that the ceremony is an exclusive religious ritual and that only members of the lineage may participate in the celebration or witness it. Strangers attend at their peril. *"Jálá"* is the generic name given to all the female members (daughters) of the lineage while *"Mọ̀sọ̀"* is that given to male members (sons). The woman shouts to inform everybody present that members of the celebrating lineage are *"Jálá"* and *"Mọ̀sọ̀"*. By shouting the warning "nobody sees the King Ọ̀ọ̀ni", she reminds everyone present that the celebrating family belongs to the royal line; that in the ancient past, people were not allowed to see the King

Ọ̀ọ̀ni. It was taboo to see him. Even now, he should not be seen on certain festival days. In a similar way, the ritual should not be witnessed by outsiders, who may come to harm by doing so.

The children of the deceased, when dancing, must not have on their caps or head-ties (for men and women respectively). It may be a sign of disrespect for the ancestors. They leave their heads uncovered for another reason: so as to receive the prayers and blessings of the ancestors without hinderance. That is the Yoruba custom.

Analysis of the Songs:

The first song speaks about the lines found on the palms of human beings. The lines were found on the palm of human beings on arrival in the world. Just as they were there when humans came into the world, so also was death found to be unavoidable on arrival in the world. The husbands of the women and the ancestors of the lineage own the women ("I belong to you"); the women thereafter salute them at the start of the rite with this song ("I bow down"). This is known as *ìjùbà*, "paying obeisance" among the Yoruba. (Awoniyi 1975:381-382; Ajuwọn 1982:21-23; Drewal & Drewal 1990:40-41,46). The women gave honour to whom it was due and could then

conduct their performance without the fear that they might come to harm.

The women compare themselves with the okro plant while the ancestors or their husbands are compared with the farmer or the reaper. The second level of meaning is that death is also recognized as the reaper here. Death as the reaper has "harvested" the deceased like a fruit. (Ajuwọn 1989:189).[16]

The second song referred to the deceased as an elephant which has climbed the *àlọ̀* hill. It is about the deceased's efforts to travel to the afterlife - it has sapped her energy. Her ambition will only be realized after the celebration of the rite. We should also note that the elephant is the biggest mammal known to the Yoruba, and recognized as an important animal. The dead is seen here as an important person in the society.

The third song pays homage to the men of the lineage. They are praised as being prosperous. The story about dresses getting lost in the palace is to highlight the fact that any of their sons can become the King Ọ̀ọ̀ni as they are from one of the four royal lineages in the city of Ifẹ. The husbands are said to have performed the ritual well because they contribute a great deal to the celebration in terms of funding. They are also praised

for having two types of farms: the farms on the outskirts of the city and those in the villages. The first group of farms are much more beneficial to the women because food crops and vegetables are usually planted there. Hence, the men are praised for taking very good care of them.

The fourth song speaks about the arrival of the ancestors of the lineage at the ritual site: "..our father has arrived". It is their arrival which sanctifies the rite and makes it efficacious.

The fifth song invites passers-by to view the celebration being performed with funds from the men of Àdàgbá segment of the lineage. This song is that of praise for their husbands. Passers-by do not accept the invitation; they run away from the ritual site if they stumble on the performers.

The last song is similar to the fifth. It is a song of praise for their husbands who are praised for feeding their wives well: "..organized the pounding of yam". It should be noted that pounded yam is considered to be the best food among the Yoruba. (Bascom 1951a:44).[17] Men who always feed their wives with this are acclaimed as the best, hence this song.

Most of these songs are those which praise the men of the lineage. It may not be an exaggeration to say that

the rite of *ẹ́kún ò́wúrọ̀* is that of thanksgiving; it expresses thanks to the lineage of the husband for taking care of the deceased woman during her lifetime.

Prayers and the Distribution of Kitchen Utensils:

Prayers are said informally by the women for the deceased and for her children. For the deceased the prayers are that God will bless her with the bounties of heaven (R.E. Dennett 1908:189), and that her aftermath (the events of the years following her death) will be good. That is to say that God will prevent evil things from happening after her death. When bad things happened one after the other after a death, it is generally believed that the deceased was bad and that he had something to do with the incidents.

For her children, the prayers are that God should help them in all their ways; that their mother (her spirit) should stay with them and help them; that their mother should come back to them as a daughter and that their mother should not frighten them (that is, she should not become a ghost which lurks around the house and dark alleys). The pots, plates and cutlery used for cooking, serving and eating the ritual food are given as

gifts to very distant relations by the women present at the ceremony. This is to ensure that the children of the deceased do not eat from those utensils again; there is a taboo prohibiting that. It is also a good way of dispersing the pollution of death.

The gifts of money collected by the women are usually divided into seven, the number of the segments in the lineage. The women from each of the segments present then divide the money among themselves. This is another way of redistributing the pollutions of death. They are also under the obligation to give some of the money to the older women from their segments who could not attend the ceremony due to ill-health or some other reasons. These activities mark the end of the celebration of the *ẹ́kún ò́wúrọ̀* rite.

But what are the practical benefits of the rite? The celebration of the rite removes the fear of breaking taboos from the minds of the offspring of the deceased. They are no longer afraid of stumbling on a place where a similar rite is being celebrated.

Members of the extended family of the dead are brought together at the celebration. The elders use the opportunity to resolve quarrels and disputes among them and give notice of dates of festivals and funerals.

Roles among the close relatives of the dead are readjusted. The siblings of the dead assume some responsibility for taking care of the deceased's children if they are young or guiding them if they are adults. In times of need, the female siblings of the dead act as mother for the children of the deceased. Examples of such times include the occasions of childbirth to them, when the female siblings of the deceased help to care for the baby and its mother; and of marriage, when the eldest female sibling sits in place of the deceased as the mother of the bride. The celebration of the *ẹkún ọ̀wúrọ̀* rite thus marks the begining of the readjustment of roles.

The Rite of "*Ìfárí Opó*".

The rite of *ifari opo* is celebrated by widows one year after the death of their husbands. *Ìfárí Opó* literally means "the shaving of the widow's head". We should note that not all the hair on the widow's head is removed. In fact, only a small part of the hair is shaved, as the action is rather symbolic. (Kayọde 1986:57; Talbot 1926:480). It is a mandatory rite performed to separate the widow from the deceased

husband. (Johnson 1921:140). We also find this rite among the Azande. (Evans-Pritchard 1974:168; Gero 1968:50). With this celebration, the ban on Ife widows wearing colourful dresses comes to an end. She is then free to wear any dress she likes. The Nyakyusa also lift a similar ban after shaving the widow's head. (Monica Wilson 1957:41). The celebration of this rite formally brings the period of mourning to an end.

On the appointed day, a large number of the wives of the lineage turn up to help the widow with cooking and to participate in the celebration of the rite. One of the older women use a new razor to shave a small amount of the widow's hair. The widow's head is then rubbed with two kola nuts. The woman who shaved the head prays that the husband should not trouble the widow as they are now formally separated. The shaved hair is collected and put in a potsherd. It is taken to the crossroad where it is burnt. The spiritual divorce between the widow and the deceased husband has thus been effected. The widow is then free to remarry if she was not inherited by any of the relatives of the deceased husband. (Leach 1958:152).

When head hair is cut, it is turned into "dirt", and is seen as a "polluting substance". (Leach 1958:157). But this dirt is potent and has been called "magical stuff"

as it is produced as a result of mourning ritual. (Leach *ibid*, 159). The widow is hereby "made sacred" as a result of this rite of separation. (Leach 1958:157).

The point of being "made sacred" brings us to the second reason for celebrating the rite. It is also used for cleansing the widow from the impurities of death and from traces of the deceased's bodily fluids, for example, his semen. (Goody 1962:61, 221 and 241). It is because of these impurities that some young men refuse to inherit widows. Men do not have to be cleansed in this way if their wives die. There are also no restrictions on them; they may wear any type of clothes they like.

But what happens to widows who refuse to celebrate this rite? It is believed that the deceased husband will punish the widow who fails to celebrate *ìfárí opó* rite. For example, in Ile-Ifẹ a woman Tóórera got married to Lérékùn. They had two children. Tóórera divorced Lérékùn and married Òjó. When Tóórera's father died, Lérékùn not only bought a burial shroud, he also made a coffin for he was a carpenter. When Tóórera's mother died, Lérékùn also bought a burial shroud and spent lavishly at the funeral. But shortly after that, Lérékùn died, Òjó also died. Tóórera did not observe the usual restrictions on widows; she walked about freely. She also refused to celebrate

the rite of "shaving the head". Rather than do this, she went to live with a man in Ekiti, eastern Yorubaland.

Seven days after her arrival, Tóórera went out early in the morning. She was reportedly met and beaten up by Lérékùn, her deceased husband. She went back to her lover's house only to die. When her corpse was taken to Ile-Ifẹ for burial, people remarked that she has died because she did not celebrate the rite of "shaving the head". The rite is evidently accepted as a rite of separation and purification.

We should note that such rites are celebrated in Nigeria not only among the Ifẹ. It was celebrated in Bonny in the nineteenth century. Archdeacon Dandeson Coates Crowther described a variant of this rite and how it was celebrated.[18] A priestess helped in the performance of the rite by using firesticks and water. Water was used to put out the fire sticks; the fire sticks were used to touch the widows and the sticks were thrown into the holes digged for that purpose.

In Ile-Ifẹ, members of the Deeper Life Bible Church, the Apostolic Faith, and a few other charismatics, try to avoid the performance of the rite. They describe the rite as "idolatory". But a large number of Christians and Muslims celebrate the rite.

The Rite of *Ìba Pípè*

In Ile-Ifẹ and all over Yorubaland, there are associations and guilds known as "*ẹgbẹ́*" or "societies". (Forde 1951:16; Fadipe 1970:257-260; Lloyd 1974:130; Eades 1980:61; Krapf-Askari 1969:83 &127). The features of these societies are that they are formed by members of the same sex, about the same age, friends; but not necessarily by people of the same religion as Eades suggests.

These societies can be classified into two types: those which are formed by traders and members of occupational guilds; and those which are formed by friends, neighbours, classmates etc., which are mainly social clubs. Weekly, fortnightly or monthly meetings are held by these societies during which food and drinks are provided in turn, by one member at each meeting. (Krapf-Askari, p.127).

The functions of these societies include rendering help to members about family problems. At meetings, various interesting topics are discussed and these may include the current activities of members in their private life. At births, marriages and funerals, a member

has the right to invite all the other members of the society to the celebration at least once in a year or once in a two-year period. (Krapf-Askari, ibid). Members may be invited in an ordinary way and treated like other sympathizers or guests. When this happens, they are offered the same quantity and quality of food and drinks as other guests. Individual members of the society give any amount of money they can afford to the host as gifts. It is also possible to invite the members to a funeral in a special way. This is known as *ìba pípè*, which literally means "special invitation to a celebration". When members are invited in this way, they are entertained with specially prepared food (a large quantity and of the highest quality), delicacies and a large quantity of drinks. (Fadipe 1970:258). But members are each obliged to give a pre-determined amount of money to the host as gifts. This is usually a substantial amount, and is to help with the expenses he or she has incurred. (Eades 1980:61). It is interesting to compare the celebration of this rite in Ile-Ifẹ to the provision of food and drinks at funeral banquets in Murelaga where:

"..The tavern provided two separate rooms and cooked two different menus. All those who gave a less expensive *misa rezada* gathered in one dining room away from those

who donated the expensive *misa cantada*. The latter were served a sumptuous meal....a glass of cognac, a cigar, and all the wine they could drink..." (Douglass 1969:48-49).

We see that the situation is the same at funerals in Ile-Ifẹ and in Murelaga. People who are invited to the *ìbà* at funerals also give out substantial amount of money and received the best food and drinks. But it is important to emphasize the fact that *ìbà pípè* rite is not a compulsory aspect of an Ife funeral. It is optional and people who cannot afford to foot the bill for its celebration do not attempt to perform it, as the expenses involved are considerable.[19]

But why is there so much emphasis on food at funerals? There is the belief in Ile-Ifẹ and in Yorubaland at large, that the food presented to guests at funerals is actually sent to the dead in the afterlife. This was discussed earlier. There is the belief that the dead eat and carry out their activities just like on earth. They may feel hungry. There is therefore the need to send food to them on a regular basis.

When a person refuses to do so, two things may happen. First, the deceased parent may become angry with the offspring, making things difficult and destroying his

(the offspring's) properties. (Abimbọla 1976:157-160). The deceased may become desperate and eat inedible things such as centipedes or worms. To avoid this, the people provide food for the dead in the forms of funeral banquets, commemorations, sacrifices and offerings, libation and also implore the dead at funerals as follows:

"Do not eat centipedes,
Do not eat earthworms,
What they eat in the realm of heaven,
Eat with them". (Idowu 1962:199).[20]

There is a similar belief in rural Greece where food is sent to the dead for the same reason, by using the same method. (Danforth 1982:104-105). Danforth gives the second reason why food is presented at funerals in rural Greece: "..to ensure the proper completion of the passage that takes place at death". (p.105). This statement is also true of the Ife. We can recall that *ẹ̀kọ*, corn gruel is the first food eaten at *ẹ́kún ọ̀wúrọ̀* rite. the women on being asked why this is so, replıed that "it is the path/way". They were, in other words, saying that this food, other kinds of food and drinks are consumed to ease the passage of the dead from the world to the afterlife

and to ensure that the dead completes its journey into the afterlife. The celebration of the rite of *ìba pípe* when plenty of food and drinks are provided ensures just that.

<u>Summary:</u> Three of the main rites celebrated by women were described in this chapter. The first one, *Ẹ́kún ò̀wúrọ̀/Ìba Orogún* is a rite performed for a deceased woman by the association of wives of male members of the lineage. It is a compulsory rite. Men, particularly the sons of the deceased, participate only by paying for the items and food used for the ritual. There the participation of men ends, for *Ìba orogún* is essentially women's ritual.

If the rite of *ẹ́kún ò̀wúrọ̀* is not celebrated, it is believed that the children of the deceased will not prosper. The rite is also celebrated so that the children of the deceased will be free to attend funeral ceremonies at which *ẹ́kún ò̀wúrọ̀* rites are celebrated. A taboo prohibits them from attendance if they have not organized the celebration of the rite for their deceased mother. The rite is also celebrated because it is regarded as a sort of sacrifice at which food and drinks are provided.

Ẹ́kún ò̀wúrọ̀ rite is celebrated to separate the deceased from the other wives of the lineage.[21] It is

also celebrated as a rite of incorporation with the ancestors. During the celebration of the rite, the *kèrègbè* (calabash) set or the *àgèrè* drum set may be beaten. The royal lineages beat the *àgèrè* while the other lineages beat the *kèrègbè*.

The feast is one of the most important aspects of *ẹ́kún òwúrọ̀* rite because the food and drinks are not only presented to the women but also to the ancestors, the divinities worshipped in the lineages, Èṣù and other spirits. Libation is poured on the ground at regular intervals.

The children of the deceased dance to the songs rendered by the women. The theme of the songs are about the heroic deeds of the ancestors and of the brave caring men of the lineage. Some of the songs are *ìjálá*, usually sung by hunters. Prayers are said for the children of the deceased that they may prosper and that bad things will not happen to them. The women also pray that God will bless the deceased with the bounties of heaven.

The practical benefits of the rite include the removal of the fear of breaking taboos from the minds of the deceased's children. Members of the extended family are brought together at the same celebration. Roles among the close relatives of the dead are also readjusted. The

celebration of the *ẹ́kún ò̀wúrọ̀* rite thus marks the begining of that process.

The second rite celebrated by women is that of *ì fárí opó*, "the shaving of the widow's head". It is celebrated by women one year after the death of their husbands. A small part of the hair is shaved because the action is meant to be symbolic. The ban on widows wearing bright clothes ends with the celebration of this rite. There is a feast which is attended by other wives of the lineage. When the widow's hair is cut, she is made sacred because dirt has been removed from her head. It is one of the ways of cleansing widows from pollution. It is also believed that the rite is a spiritual divorce between the widow and the deceased husband. If a widow refused to celebrate the rite, it is held that the deceased husband will punish the widow.

The third rite celebrated by women is that of *Ì̀ba pípè*. It is possible for a celebrant to invite the members of a society, club or an association to a funeral in a special way. This is known as *ì̀ba pípè*, "special invitation to a celebration". People who are invited to the *ì̀ba* at funerals give out substantial amount of money and receive the best food and drinks.

There is an emphasis on food at funerals in Ile-Ifẹ and in Yorubaland because the food presented to guests at funerals are believed to be sent to the dead in the afterlife. If food is not sent regularly to the dead in heaven, the deceased parent may become angry with her children and make them become poor or sick. The deceased may also resort to the eating of inedible things. The consumption of food at these funeral feasts also ensures that the passage of the dead from the world to heaven is eased and that the dead arrives successfully in the afterlife.

The next chapter will be devoted to the study of the funeral rites of *Ẹ̀sọ́ gbígbé*.

Endnotes:

1. Mbou makes a note of women's participation in such exclusive rites of passage. (1987:19).

2. Chief 'Tunji Adeyẹfa, Ifá diviner, Personal communication on 16th August, 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ.

3. Although the wives of the lineage are responsible for celebrating the rite, the sons of the deceased woman help pay for most of the cost. Besides, other members of the deceased's extended family who would eventually contribute money and materials for the celebration only

volunteer to do so when the children of the dead decide to host and fund the celebration.

4. Informant: Late Madam Comfort Adéyọ́ọ̀là Adégòkè, Personal communication on 10th August, 1989 at Ile-Ifẹ.

5. The *Ifá* verse was recited for me by Chief 'Tunji Adeyẹfa and Mr Awosise at Ile-Ifẹ on 25th August, 1990.

6. They act as ritual specialists, following the tradition laid down by women at the funeral of Àkòkọọ́là. This we saw earlier on in the connecting myth.

7. M.T.Drewal (1989:219) states that the name *agere* not only refers to these drums but also "to the dance". She adds that the quality which distinguishes it from other drum sets is its "rolling" rhythm.

8. Recorded at the celebration of the *Ẹ́kún-òwúrọ̀* rite of late Madam Yẹlé Adegoke on October 24, 1986 at Ile-Ifẹ.

9. This prayer is similar to the "presentation speeches" made to the dead by the Ashanti. (Rattray 1954:158).

10. Wives of male members of the lineage.

11. Journal of Samuel Ajayi Crowther, (CA2 031) of 30th Sept., 1866. (C.M.S. Yoruba Mission Papers).

12. We also note that among the Black Carib women of Central America, the older women are responsible for organizing and leading the performance of a similar rite of death. (Kerns 1980:128,136-139).

[13]. These "death dances", as Middleton observes "are the main components in the business of restoring order". (1982:147).

[14]. This song and the following five were recorded at two different celebration of *ẹ́kún-ò́wúrọ̀* rites on 24th October, 1986 and 20th August, 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ.

[15]. For a list of the palm tree's products and what they are used for, see G.J.A. Ojo (1966:81-82).

[16]. See Alexiou (1974:195) for a similar flower symbolism among the Greeks.

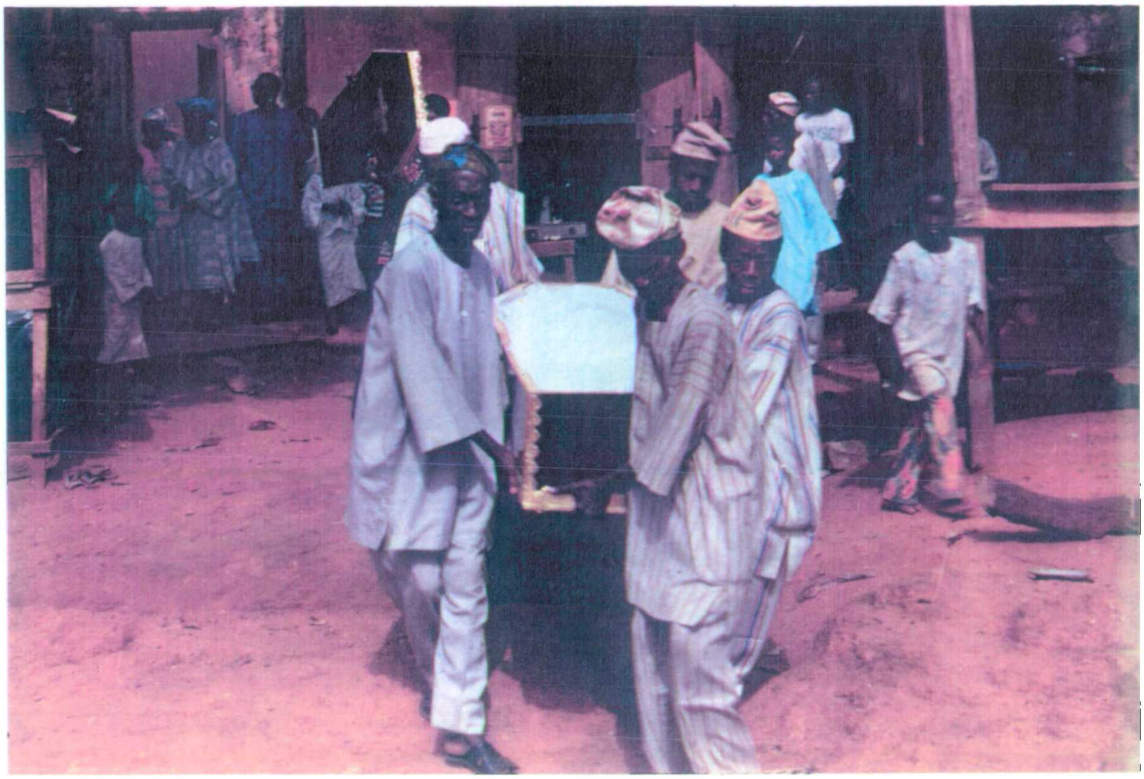
[17]. For the method of preparing pounded yam or ("yam loaf"), see Bascom 1951b:132.

[18]. CA3/013, Archdeacon Dandeson Coates Crowther, Journal & Reports (38) 36-49, 1862-1880, C.M.S. Archives.

[19]. We note that similar death feasts are held for male associations among the Yako of Eastern Nigeria. (Forde 1962:93).

[20]. See also Gbadamọsi & Beier (1967:6); Beier (1970:66) and Abimbọla (1973a:62).

[21]. It was Friedl (1984:11) who observes that such celebrations are not just "ritual drama", they are also efficacious in the sense that they "bring about the change which it celebrates", in this case, the separation of the deceased from other women.



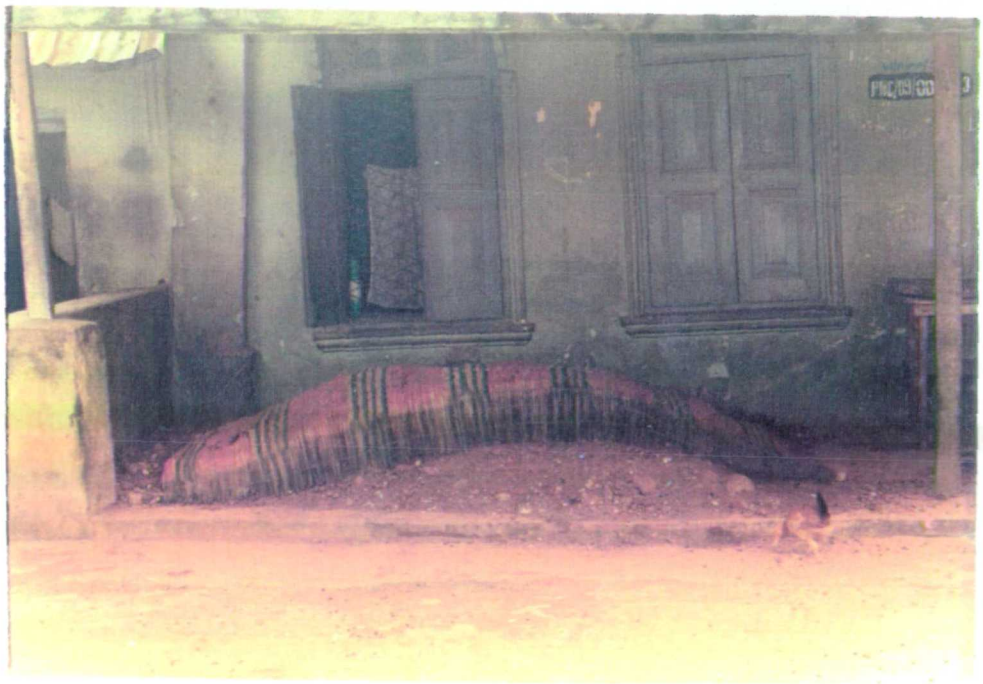
(i) The Ìsòǫ́gán at work.

(ii) Graves in front of a house.

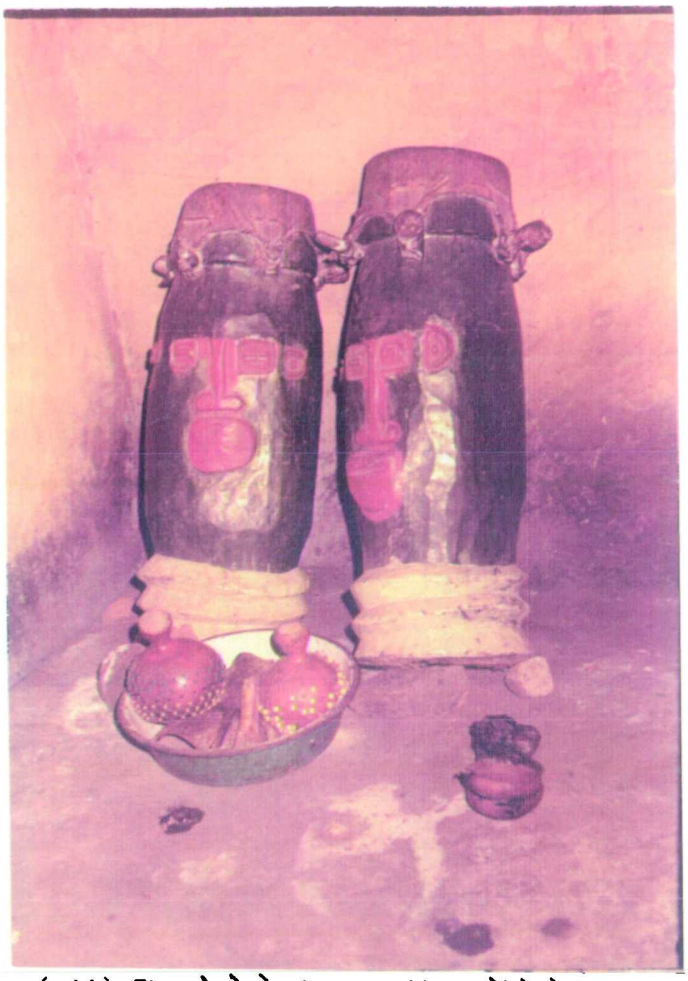
(iii) The dead displayed in a room.

(iv) Dancing at a funeral.

(v) An Ifa Priest, Chief Tunji Adeyẹfa. Note his divinig tray on the mat.



(vi) A new grave covered with a mat.



(vii) The àgèrè drums, the ṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀ and other musical instruments played by the women.

viii) Dancing at an ẹkún òwúrọ̀ rite.

(ix) Transporting the agere drums.

x) Performing the ẹkún òwúrọ̀ rite.

CHAPTER 9.

ÈSÓ GBÍGBÉ: THE RITUALS OF MEN AND WOMEN.

Introduction:

Èṣọ́ gbígbé is the death ritual celebrated for deceased men and women in some lineages in Ile-Ifẹ. These lineages are descendants of *Èṣọ́ Ìkòyí*. They include the lineages of Jàgùdù, Àpáàdì and Gbọ̀nkáà. These three lineages and some others in Ile-Ifẹ who are descendants of Èsọ́ Ìkòyí have been thoroughly assimilated in Ifẹ.[1] They are regarded as "Ifẹ proper" like members of all the other Ifẹ lineages but any of their members cannot become the King Ọọ̀ni as they are not from the royal lineages.

It is not only in Ifẹ that we can find the descendants of *Èṣọ́ Ìkòyí*. They are found all over Yorubaland including parts of Ọ̀fà and Ìlọ́rin. They are the descendants of warriors; brave men and women who led wars in ancient times in Yorubaland and during the inter-tribal wars of the nineteenth century. (Abraham 1958:197 and Barber 1991:150-1).[2]

The leader of the *èṣọ́* is known as Oníkòyí or Olúkòyí,[3] which means "the owner of Ìkòyí"; Ìkòyí being his base-city. (Barber 1991:120 & 173). *Èṣọ́ gbígbé* is the rite celebrated to effect a formal separation between the dead and members of his family. Although it is

celebrated as the last rite at the funeral, it is also used to commemorate all the deceased warriors of the lineage. Literally, *ẹ̀ṣọ́ gbígbé* means "the carrying of the *ẹ̀ṣọ́*". The reference to "carrying" here is to the wearing of special costumes at the celebration and the carrying of weapons by two special ritual personnel. We shall have a detailed look at this later on. Whereas most rites are celebrated either for men only or for women, this particular rite is celebrated for both men and women who are deceased. There is the acceptance here that men and women can be warriors and fighters in their own rights. The women of these lineages are thus recognized as warriors and brave members. Women are recognized as "fighters" because they participated in warfare in the Ikoyi lineage in the past, before the sacking of ancient Ìkòyí and also because they helped the men in preparing for war. We will see the example of the wife of Olúkòyí in the myth to be related. At death, they receive equal treatment which they deserve.

The Rituals:

But how did this rite first come into being? The begining of its celebration can be found in the story of Olúkòyí. With his wife and other warriors, they had won

several wars and gained slaves and properties. On a particular occasion, he consulted some Ifá priests to divine before going to war. He was asked to offer a sacrifice. He did not. Olúkòyí was killed in the heat of battle. His wife asked other warriors to carry his body. They sang some dirges and some other songs and celebrated the funeral in a particular way. Since that time, members of *èṣọ́ ìkòyí* lineages have celebrated the final funeral rite of their memebers in this way. That was the begining of the celebration of the rite. The full story from the Ifá verse known as *Ososa* is as follows[4] :

Olúkòyí ọmọ ādìílẹ̀ gelemọ lójú ogun
Ká gbégbà nídìí ọ̀pẹ̀
Ká torí ọ̀pẹ̀ gbégbà wá sàlẹ̀
Ó difá fún Olúkòyí
Tó ńgbógun ròde Òkò
Wọ́n ní kó ṣe èètùtù
Kò ṣé.
Bẹ́ẹ̀ ni ó ti ńjagun
Ó ti ńṣẹ́gun rí.
Bó bá máa digun
Ìyàwó rẹ̀ á dígun
Òun náà á digun
Ọkọ á máa bẹ́rí

Àti àwọn èrò ẹhìn wọn.
Asáṣẹ́ṣẹ́ ọmọ ogun Olúkòyí
Ẹ̀kànwọ̀wọ̀ ọmọ ogun Olúkòyí
Àti àwọn bẹ́ẹ̀ bẹ́ẹ̀ lọ.
Bẹ́ẹ̀ ló ṣe máa lọ tó ńṣégun.
Ó dé Òde Òkò
Ó jà jà jà
Ogun fọ́ bí igbá
Ó là bí àwò.
Bí ìyàwó rẹ̀ ti ńtafà
Bẹ́ẹ̀ lòun náà mbẹ́rí
Gbogbo ìjà tí ó dojú kọ ogun Onikòyí
Ọfà, oògùn tó máa ńdàálẹ̀
Bí a bá ńta á sí Oníkòyí
Gbogbo rẹ̀ bàá lọ́jọ́ náà.
Ìyàwó rẹ̀ nikan ni kò bà
Nípa eléyìí, Oníkòyí kú
Tòun toògùn rẹ̀ lójú ogun.
Nígbà tí ọfà ba ọkọ rẹ̀
Ìyàwó Oníkòyí bá yípo
Ó ní kí àwọn ọmọ ẹhìn gbé ọkọ òun.
Ó sì gbée padà sí ìlú Ìkòyí
Pẹ̀lú oúndè àti orin akọ ogun lẹ́nu.
Ó sọ báyìí pé:

"Níjọ́ ikú Ẹ̀sọ́,

Tàwa tapó la nà gbalaja" (2ce)

Wọ́n ńkọrin yìí tẹ̀le

Nígbà tí a ńgbé òkú rẹ̀ bọ̀

Nígbà tí wọ́n délé

Wọ́n fi ẹnu bọ orin:

"Èrọ̀ẹ̀rẹ̀ pẹ̀lú èrò Òkò

Wọ́n p'Olúkòyí o

Èrọ̀ẹ̀rẹ̀ p'Olúkòyí ò

Èrọ̀ẹ́rẹ́ p'Olúkòyí ò

Níjọ́ ikú Ẹ̀sọ́

Tàwa tapó la nà gbalaja."

<u>Translation: "The Carrying of Ẹ̀sọ́" from Ifá Verse- Ọ̀sọ̀sa.</u>

Olúkòyí, Son of him who carries great medicines

And weapons at war

To carry a climbing rope at the foot of the palm tree

To bring a climbing rope down

From the top of the palm tree

Performed Ifá divination for Olúkòyí

Who proposed to wage war against the town of Òde Òkò

He was asked to perform a sacrifice

He refused to do so.

He had been waging wars

And had been winning before.
Whenever he was dressed for war
His wife too was always ready for war
Olúkòyí would be decapitating the opponents
His warriors would be doing the same.
Asasese, warrior of Olúkòyí
Ẹ̀kànwọ̀wọ̀, warrior of Olúkòyí
And all such warriors.
That was how Olúkòyí used to win wars.
He arrived at Òde Òkò
He fought with all his energy
The war shattered like a calabash
And split like a plate.
The wife was shooting arrows
The husband was decapitating the enemies
All the missiles aimed at Oníkòyí's army
Arrows, medicines which used to miss him
When shot at him
All got their target that day
But failed to hit the wife
Olúkòyí died on account of this
With all his medicines in the heat of war.
When arrows struck his husband
His wife turned around

And instructed the warriors to carry her husband's body
To the town of Ìkòyí
With all their medicines while rendering warriors' songs
It goes as follows:
"On the day when Eso died,
We fell flat on the ground
With our quivers" (2ce).
They sang this song on the way
While the body was in transit.
When they arrived at Ìkòyí
They rendered another song:
"Èrọ̀ṣẹ̀ṣẹ̀ with the people of Òkò
They killed Olúkòyí
Èrọ̀ṣẹ̀rẹ̀ killed Olúkòyí
Èrọ̀ṣẹ̀rẹ̀ killed Olúkòyí
On the day when Ẹ̀ṣọ́ died
We fell flat on the ground
With our quivers".

The lineages of *Ẹ̀ṣọ́ Ìkòyí* at Ile-Ifẹ celebrate the ritual of *ẹ̀ṣọ́ gbígbé* in a similar manner to how it was celebrated at the death of Olúkòyí. The rite is usually celebrated for men and daughters of the lineages who were about the age of forty years and above. It is usually

celebrated at about three o'clock in the afternoon. The children and kin of the dead prepare different kinds of food for the rite. These include cassava food (*ẹ̀bà*), fried bean cakes (*àkàrà*), yam flour food (*àmàlà*), plenty of meat and palm wine.

Two people who are members of the lineage (always a young man and a young woman), actually "carry the *ẹ̀ṣọ́*". Their benefit is a fowl each, slaughtered and cooked for them. They normally consume these after the celebration. The items required for the ritual include two chicken (one hen and one cock), palm oil, kola nuts (*Cola Acuminata*), alligator-pepper (*Melegueta*), *olóṣè* bush rat, matchets, bows and arrows, and dane guns/flint guns. In addition to these, there are specially made dresses which are worn as costumes for the rites. The main participants in the celebration, the young man and the young woman wear these. There is a male dress and a female dress. These are kept in the central hall of the lineage. Traditional drummers are invited to the celebration and their role is mainly the beating of drums to the songs rendered.

Certain taboos are observed by members of the *ẹ̀ṣọ́ ìkòyí* lineages. It is important to mention these as some of them are breached at the celebration of the rite of

ẹ̀ṣó gbígbé. Firstly, men should not wear women's dresses and women should not wear men's clothes. Secondly, members of the lineage must not eat *olose* bush rat, all kinds of snakes, *ewe* mushroom, and bats; for these are totems of the lineages.[5] Finally, those members of the lineages who have not celebrated the rite for their deceased parents are excluded from attendance. They may incur the wrath of their deceased parents if they attended as the ancestors of the lineage are believed to be present at the celebration. As for outsiders, they are proscribed from attendance: they may come to harm by watching the performance. Besides, the rite is supposed to be an exclusive rite of separation, whereby participants are restrictive to a small group.

The taboos which are breached include the ban on the wearing of the dresses of the opposite sex and the ban on the use of *olóṣè* bush rat for domestic purposes. At the celebration, the young woman wears a man's clothes while the young man wears a woman's dress.[6] *Olóṣè* bush rat is one of the sacrificial items although it is not used in day-to-day life. Women hold and wield matchets during the performance, slinging the matchets as if they are poised to attack enemies with them; men hold bows and arrows and handle them as if they are at the battle

front.[7] There are two observations here. Firstly, the use of those sacrificial objects banned in everyday life signifies a disorder in the life of the people. This was brought about by the death of the deceased. Order can only be restored when the rite has been successfully celebrated and concluded. Secondly, the use of the weapons in a threatening way reenacts the war which led to the death of the founder of the lineages, Olúkòyí of Ẹ̀ṣọ́ Ìkòyí. It also portrays the members of the lineages as brave warriors. This is reflected in the praise poem (*oríkì*) of the lineages which depicts them as follows:

"Ẹ̀ṣọ́ is never hit on the back with an arrow,[8]
Ẹ̀ṣọ́ has no graveyard,
Their grave is the site of death
At the war-front".

The praise poem clearly says that they are brave and would not run away at war, since it is those who run away who can be hit on the back with arrows, the *ẹ̀ṣọ́* normally fights until he or she dies. When the war is fierce, there may not be the chance to carry the dead away, hence *ẹ̀ṣọ́* may be buried at the war-front. All these point to the bravery and the courage of the lineages which is re-enacted in the performance of the rite. The celebration

of the rite also ensures that the deceased reach the afterlife.

The wearing of the dresses of the opposite sex by the young man and the young woman is also a classic reversal of roles, (Barber 1991:173-4), which also signifies a temporary disorder in the community. Its implication seems to be the equality of the sexes in the lineages in terms of how brave they are and the fact that members of the opposite sex can be regarded as warriors in their own rights.

The young man and the young woman wear their costumes at the grave of the deceased. Members of the lineage who would have been entertained earlier on in the central hall, all follow the two ritual specialists, singing and dancing. Most of them will be armed with the weapons described earlier. A sacrifice will be offered to the dead in the central hall by the *Lóógun* of the lineage. Seven songs are usually rendered for deceased women while nine songs are sung for deceased men. Seven and nine are always the ritual numbers for women and men respectively in the Yoruba society. The drummers assist with the beating of drums until evening when the rite comes to an end. The highlights of the celebration is the singing, dancing and the slinging of the weapons in a

manner reminiscent of warriors at war. Some of the songs are reproduced below:

(i). *Ọjọ́ ikú ẹ̀ṣọ́,*
Tòun towó asùngbalaja,
Ọjọ́ ikú ẹ̀ṣọ́,
Tòun towó asùngbalaja.

Translation:

On the day of Ẹ̀ṣọ́'s death,
He fell over flat on the ground
With lots of money on him.
On the day of Ẹ̀ṣọ́'s death
He fell over flat on the ground
With lots of money on him.

(ii) *A ó pòkòkó gbógun jà o,*
Pò kò kó.

Translation:

We will rally round,
To wage a war
We will indeed.

(iii). *Ẹ̀ṣọ́ ò nílé*

Èrùà nílé ọmọ Agbọ̀nkẹrẹyẹ.

Translation:

Ẹ̀ṣọ́ has no real home

Èrùà is the home of the son of Agbọ̀nkẹrẹyẹ.

(iv) *Ìran okó níí lodẹ gbó*

Ìran ọrùn níí lòlẹ̀kẹ̀

Bèbè ìdí níí lo kíjìpá

Ìsàlẹ̀ òbò ní ó lo ẹpọ̀n gbó.

Translation:

It is the generation of penis

Which uses brass until it wears out

It is the generation of necks

Which uses beads

Beaded-waists uses the *kíjìpá* woven dress

The inner part of the vagina

Uses the scrotum until the scrotum becomes old.

Interpretation of the Songs:

The first song is a variant of that song rendered at the funeral of Olúkòyí. But instead of saying "we fell flat on the ground, with our quivers", it says "he fell

over flat on the ground, with lots of money on him". The emphasis is now on "money" or wealth instead of "quivers" or weapons. The reason for this is that members of the lineages of *Ẹ̀ṣọ́ Ìkòyí* no longer go to war as they used to do in the last century and early this century. They now try to make money to live on like other people. The song also emphasizes the two characteristics of the Ẹ̀ṣọ́ Ìkòyí: "thievery" and "warfare". (Barber 1991:13,173 & 174). These, according to Barber, "were the two legendary occupations of the Ìkòyí people". (p. 173).[9]

The second song is on rallying round to wage a war. It is a song of remembrance of the deeds of their ancestors in the last century.[10] Implicitly, it is talking of their rallying round to celebrate the rite of *ẹ̀ṣọ́ gbígbé* for the deceased.

The third song speaks of the homelessness of Eso in the nineteenth century. Although the Eso lineages had traditionally lived in Ìkòyí, their frequent war campaigns meant that they had to drift from place to place, from one war to another. They were professional warriors and in the quest for victory, they often became homeless in the process and lived a sort of nomadic life.[11] In fact, they can be found all over Yorubaland today because wars and the search for a permanent home

had dispersed them. (Barber 1991:150-1). *Erua* was any place or city where the business of war took them. They are no longer homeless and a large number can be found in Ile-Ifẹ.

The last song is about the male and female sex organs and their uses. It is a jocular song greatly liked by both old and young; the old in a discreet way but the young, openly. The social function of such songs has been put very clearly by Evans-Pritchard in "The Dance":

"..The dance therefore also belongs to that group of social institutions which allow sexual play to a moderate and discreet extent, the functions of which are to canalize the forces of sex into socially harmless channels, and by doing so to assist the process of selection and to protect the institutions of marriage and the family". (1928:458).

The singing of this song thus gives the members of the Ẹ̀sọ́ lineage the opportunity to engage in "sexual play" of a very limited nature and helps put sex in the correct perspective, and reinforces the "institution of marriage and the family" in the society. When this song is rendered, it is not regarded as a vulgar song. It is rather seen as a sacred song and is never sung at any other time.[12]

The procession comes back to the central hall of the lineage, where members drink palm-wine. The two main ritual officials, that is the young man and woman, each eat the chicken and the cock cooked for them: the woman eats the cock while the man eats the chicken. This effectively brings the ritual ceremony to a close.

Incidence of spirit possession by women and men usually takes place during the celebration. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

<u>Summary:</u>

The Ẹ̀ṣọ́ Ìkòyí lineages in Ile-Ifẹ celebrate the rite of *Ẹ̀ṣọ́ Gbígbé* for deceased men and women over the age of forty years old. The Ẹ̀ṣọ́ Ìkòyí are the descendants of warriors and can be found all over Yorubaland. *Ẹ̀ṣọ́ gbígbé* is celebrated to separate the deceased from members of the lineage and to commemorate all the deceased warriors of the lineage.

The lineages of Ẹ̀ṣọ́ Ikoyi at Ile-Ifẹ celebrate the ritual of *èṣọ́ gbígbé* in a similar manner to how it was celebrated at the death of Olúkòyí, the founder of the lineages. A feast is prepared and two members of the lineage (a young man and a woman), actually "carry the *èṣọ́*". The man wears a woman's dress while the woman wears

a man's clothes. Religious laws observed by members of the lineage are breached at the celebration of the rite.

Women hold and wield matchets during the performance, slingimg the matchets as if they are poised to attack enemies with them; men hold bows and arrows and handle them as if they are at the battle front. The use of banned items as sacrificial items signify a temporary disorder (brought about by the death) in the life of the people. Order will be restored when the rite has been celebrated. Secondly, the use of weapons re-enact the war which led to the death of the founder of the lineage, Oníkòyí. Members of the lineage are also portrayed as brave warriors. The celebration also ensures that the deceased reach the afterlife, if he or she was an old person.

A sacrifice is offered to the dead by the *Lóógun* in the central hall of the lineage. Songs are rendered amidst the beating of drums and dancing. The slinging of weapons also continues. While some of the songs speak about the war at which Olúkòyí fell, others emphasize the characteristics of the Ìkòyí people: "thievery and warfare"; yet others remember the homelessness of the Ìkòyí people; and a jocular song speaks of male and female sex organs and their uses.

The eating of the fowls by the two ritual officials conclude the celebration of the rite.

Endnotes:

[1]. My main informants on the rite of *Èṣọ́ Gbígbé* are Pa Bamidele Akinwande, Mr 'Dosu Akinwande, Mrs 'Dekẹ Akinwande and Chief 'Tunji Adeyẹfa. Meetings with them were held on various days between 3rd and 28th August, 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ.

[2]. See Ajayi & Smith (1964:9 & 11) and Smith (1969:127,155-156) for reference to persistent wars all over Yorubaland, especially in the years between 1820 and 1893.

[3]. Smith described the modern Oníkòyí of Ìkòyí as "the leading *Oba* in the Ekuro Osi province of Ọyọ Kingdom". (1969:110).

[4]. Chief 'Tunji Adeyẹfa, Personal communication on 21st August, 1990 at Ile-Ifẹ.

[5]. For a brief comment and example of further totems among the Yoruba, see Ajuwọn (1980:67).

[6]. See also Barber (1991:173) on the dressing of men and women for this rite among the Èṣọ́ Ìkòyí of Okuku town.

[7]. Barber's interpretation of the ritual drama is that the two principal participants (the man and the woman)

"stole" each other's clothes and "attacked" one another with their weapons. (1991:174).

[8]. Johnson (1921:73) also notes the bravery of the Ẹ̀ṣọ́, that they are never hit on the back with arrows by the enemy at war. Hence, Smith refers to the *Ẹ̀ṣọ́* of the Ọ̀yọ́ Empire as "the *corps d'elite*". (1969:121).

[9]. See also the praise poem of *Ẹ̀ṣọ́ Ìkòyí* which when loosely translated says "..one cannot engage in ceaseless warfare like Oníkòyí, without adding some thievery to it". (my translation). (Babalola 1973:61).

[10]. Perhaps it is right to say that their propensity to engage in endless warfare was to punish those who did not like them, or, in other words, their enemies. We get a glimpse of this in a praise-poem of the Ẹ̀ṣọ́ Ìkòyí, collected by Professor Peter Morton-Williams at Ọyọ in 1957. It states *inter alia*: "...he brings trouble to those who don't like him..".

[11]. Hence, Ajuwon's observation that the 19th Century wars broke up many communities and scattered them all over Yorubaland. (1980:67). This is what Smith describes as "economic and social dislocation". (1969:129).

[12]. The main funeral songs of the Bara of Madagascar are those with "the sexual theme". (Huntington & Metcalf 1979:110). See also Huntington (1973:77-78) who notes

that the songs and other aspects of the funeral represent "the Bara notion of vitality".

CHAPTER 10.

SPIRIT POSSESSION AND DEATH.

The instances of spirit possession in connection with the rites of death will be related in this chapter. The first is possession states in connection with the carrying of the *àgerè* drums used for the celebration of the rite of *ekun owuro*.[1] The performance of this rite was described in Chapter 8. In this instance, it is the women, usually two, who carry the *agere* drums from the house of the most senior wife (*ìyàálé*) to the ritual site who are possessed. In the second instance, possession states occur during the celebration of the rite of *èṣó gbígbé*.[2] Here it is not only women who are possessed; men too are also possessed. But what is the Yoruba belief about spirit possession?

The Yoruba believe that the world is full of unseen spirits and forces (Leighton *et al*, 1963:35), and that the divinities, the dead, animals, trees, rivers and fairies all have spirits which inhabit them. (Idowu 1962:11). These spirits are generally unseen. In Ile-Ifẹ, they are generally referred to as *ebúrú*. They are believed to roam about from place to place and any of them can get into a human, thereby possessing him or her. When this happens, the Yoruba say that the spirit, the

dead or the divinity "mounts" the person. (Verger 1969:52; Bascom 1969b:78; Barber 1981:734). The Yoruba word for "mount" is *gùn*. This may also be translated as "ride". (Parrinder 1972:52).

People may be possessed[3] by the divinities which they worship or; others may be possessed at funerals, by the dead or by *Ẹ̀ṣọ́*. This chapter is concerned with the latter, but a word will be said here on the former.

Men and women may become *adósù*[4] by having tufts of hair left at the top of their head, towards the back. Medicines are used to make this *osu*.[5] Sacrifices are also offered to the divinity concerned. The worshipper of the divinity is initiated and thus made ready for sessions of possession by having this *òṣù*. (M.T. Drewal 1986:61). In this case, the possession which comes to the worshipper is sought.

When a person is prepared for possession in this way, he or she is said to "*dá òṣù*", that is, "creates *òṣù*". This means he has been given special medicines orally and some medicines have been put on his head to facilitate possession states.[6] He becomes an *adósù*, a spirit medium. The worshipper also learns how to control the possession, although he or she might not be altogether successful at doing this. Hence, it might be a

bit uncontrolled, but fellow worshippers may be able to help him. As a medium, he or she passes the messages of the divinity to other worshippers during possession. (M. Drewal 1992: 182 and Verger *ibid*, p. 57).

Other groups of people may become possessed. They are not *adósù*, but may be possessed by the divinities. Examples are worshippers and wives of male members of Walode lineage in Ile-Ifẹ who have Olókun divinity as their tutelary god. One or more of the women become possessed during the annual festival of Olókun divinity. They are not prepared for possession, in the sense that they are not given the *osu* on their heads. They are possessed because they are members of the lineage and participate in the worship of the divinity. They are not spirit mediums, although they pass on the messages of olókun divinity at the annual festival. They become possessed during singing, when drums are beaten and dancing is in progress.[7]

The two instances of possession which will be discussed here are classic spirit possession cases and the possessed are not spirit mediums. They were possessed by the dead and did not pass any message to people around. But those around the possessed acknowledged that a spirit has passed into the possessed's body because of

the reaction or the changes they could see. Those possessed are not spirit mediums because they do not deliver messages from the spirits of the dead which possessed them; the medium's emphasis is "communication". (Raymond Firth 1969:xi). We will now discuss the two examples of spirit possession associated with death rituals among the Ife.

Spirit Possession in the Death Rite of *Ẹ́kún Ọ̀wúrọ̀*:

As mentioned earlier on, the *agere* drums and other musical instruments are kept in the house of the most senior wife of the lineage, the *ìyàálé*. Two of the wives of the lineage are requested to carry the drums from the house of the most senior wife to the ritual site, which in most cases is the house of the dead. Occasionally, the drums may be tied together with scarfs. When this is done, only one woman may be asked to transport it.

But what are the criteria followed in choosing any two particular women? Firstly, the two women must be wives of male members of that segment of the lineage where the death has occurred. Secondly, a woman is usually chosen if she is hot-headed, hot tempered and unruly. Carrying of the drums is believed to be sufficient remedy to make her become level headed and

well-behaved. This is a "letting off steam" strategy. (Beattie & Middleton 1969:xxviii; Ludwig 1968:89). As Lewis (1986:55) puts it, "...it ventilates aggression and frustration within the status quo". Thirdly, when a woman appears to be barren or has had a series of abortions or stillbirths, she is encouraged to carry the drums in the belief that her problems will come to an end. (Verger 1969:51).

Although the women may become possessed in the course of carrying the drums, this may not always be so. There is the belief that they all have their problems solved whether they were possessed or not. It is therefore not the possession *per se* which brings an end to their problems but their participation in the celebration of the rite by carrying the drums. This has been expressed clearly by one of the healers in Raymond Prince's paper, "Possession and Social Cybernetics" :

"...it is the joining of the cult and the carrying out of ritual behaviour (sacrifices, processions, etc.) within the cult that is therapeutic". (1968:158).

We will shortly discuss why this type of treatment is highly effective, but we will now see the process of carrying of the drums and how the woman usually become possessed.

The Carrying of the *Agere*: The carriers of the drums are followed by about six to ten women. Their tasks are two-fold. Firstly, the women have to clap and sing various songs while following the carriers. Secondly, the women have to support physically the carriers if and when the carriers become possessed. They are also to ensure that the drums do not fall off and that the carriers do not fall over or have their dresses loosened. That is, the carriers must not be exposed.

It is during the singing of those songs by the women that the carriers sometimes find it difficult to take further steps, becoming ecstatic and swaying this way and the other; their eyes having rolled up into the eyelids. The women carriers are therefore seen as being "possessed" by the dead. They have been "mounted" by the dead. Music has been found to be one of the stimuli or agents which can easily bring about possession during the performance of a rite. (Rouget 1977:233; Field 1960:59 & 1969:7; Lewis 1971:39 & 1989:34). In this instance, it was one of the agents which helped to induce the possession of the carriers by the dead. It is not only in Ife among the Yoruba that there is the belief that the spirit of the dead can possess a person. In the Southern

district of Ghana, the spirit of the dead "drives" people when the coffin is being carried around the town. (Field 1960:77).

The singing women support the possessed women physically and move them on until they reach the ritual site, where the drums are put on the ground. The possessed women do not normally speak during the period of possession. They are led into a room where palm oil is forced into their mouths; water may also be poured on their heads. They will regain consciousness shortly afterwards. Palm oil is used here as a propitiatory pomade, ẹ̀rọ̀ which makes the spirit of the dead leave them as soon as possible. (Parrinder 1972:52). The possessed women cannot remember what happened to them during the period of their dissociation. (Binford 1980:8). This has been described as "a complete amnesia" by Field (1960:57). The women felt tired after they regained consciousness but they became satisfied and contented that their needs would be met. In this type of possession, people can control the possessed but the possessed may not be able to control themselves. It is also unsought. (Lewis 1971:55). The women had no form of control over where, and when they are possessed and for how long; they do not want to be possessed at all. In

fact, it is because of this fear of being possessed that the older women sometimes find it difficult to find a volunteer who will carry the drums. Possession in this form is thus feared by the women of the lineage. (Lewis 1986:88).

In some cultures, there is the belief that the possessing spirit actually displaces the soul of the possessed during dissociation. (Bourguignon 1968:9). This is absent in Ile-Ifẹ where the soul of a person is never believed to be able to leave the body except at death. It is the spirit of the dead which mounts the possessed women and leaves after the spell of possession. It has no association with the souls of the possessed.

This form of spirit possession cannot be explained in terms of deprivation. The deprivation hypothesis as expatiated by Lewis (1966:313-315; 1975:75-85; 1986:33-35) does not apply to the situation in Ile-Ifẹ. None of the women were possessed because they were deprived of material goods or affection. Women in Ifẹ are mainly traders, with a good number of them being prosperous. Most of the goods which the Somali women lacked in Lewis' study - "luxurious clothes, perfume and delicate foods" (Lewis 1986:32) are readily available to most of these women.

But there is a plausible explanation for this. Raymond Prince (1968:161-163) in his study suggests that when there is an increase in different types of social and health problems ("social pathology"), there tend to be presciptions that certain religious rites should be celebrated. These celebrations bring together members of the lineage, who observe all the relevant taboos. All these help to consolidate the relationships betweeen them. Communication between them would also have improved.

The barren woman or the woman who has had some abortions or stillbirths will therefore be helped by participation in the rite because people's attention will be drawn to her plight, and people will give her various suggestions and advice as to what measures to adopt. In this way, her participation acts as a "bonding mechanism". (Anita Spring 1978:188). As for the woman who is hot-headed, hot tempered and unruly, she will benefit from the improved communication in the lineage. All these is not to say that they do not benefit from the possession act itself. In fact, they are believed to attain certain peace from it. (Field 1960:57). We should not forget to add that the women also receive some money as gifts from the children of the deceased woman.

Spirit Possession and the Death Rite of *Èsó Gbígbé* :

Dùndún drummers provide music at the celebration of the rite of *èṣọ́ gbígbé*. It is this music which precipitates the onset of spirit possession. (Rouget 1977:233 & 235; Field 1960:59). As the members of the Eso lineages say "it is only when the drums are beaten and songs are rendered that people are possessed". The young man and the young woman who "carry the *èṣọ́*" are not usually possessed but five to six members out of those members of the lineage who accompany those two may be possessed all at the same time. Those possessed may be members of the two sexes. When this happens, the people say that "*èṣọ́* has mounted them". At other times, they say that "the dead has possessed them". Parrinder probably heard about this or watched it during his stay in Yorubaland. He notes that :

"The spirit of some departed are believed to take possession of their living relatives. This may happen especially during one of the funeral rites when the drumming and singing relate the history of the family and the qualities of a departed member". (1972:52).

As soon as these people become possessed, they begin to tremble and may fall over if they are not held by

people around. The possessed people may roll on the ground if not held firmly but they do not talk. The members of the lineage generally recognize the fact that the spirit of the dead do not leave some of those possessed for up to thirty minutes. But for some, possession lasts for about ten to fifteen minutes.

Three things may be done to help the possessed regain consciousness. Firstly, palm oil may be poured into their mouths. (Parrinder 1972:52). Palm oil is used here as a soothing, calming oil. Secondly, the drumming and singing is stopped. This is to ensure that the relating of lineage history and praise poem which usually precipitates and maintains the possession state stops. Thirdly, if the possession state persists, two fowls (one cock and one hen) are slaughtered. Blood from the cock is dripped into possessed women's mouths while blood from the hen is dripped into the possessed men's mouths.[8] The women also step on the blood of the cock while the men will be helped to place their feet on the blood of the hen. We should note that the possessing spirit of the dead is treated like a divinity here because the blood is meant for its use; whereas in day to day life, blood is the essence of a sacrificial victim usually offered to the divinities. (Awolalu 1972:105; Parrinder 1950b:19-22;

Pemberton 1989:122 & 130). The possessed people usually regain consciousness after this.

During the period of their possession, guns, matchets, bows and arrows are taken away from them so that they may not use them to attack other people if the divinity of iron, Ògún should happen also to possess them in addition to the spirit of the dead. This is because Ogun divinity is regarded as a violent god.[9] (Pemberton 1977:17 & 18; 1989:122 & 130). He can possess a person and transfer this quality to the possessed. This has been described as the "process of identification". (Rouget 1977:236-237; Verger 1963:17 & 20; 1969:50).

The possessed people cannot remember what happened to them during their period of possession, (Binford 1980:8); "a complete amnesia" (Field 1960:57). No therapeutic benefits have been reported by those who have been possessed by the dead in the rite of *èṣó gbígbé*, but the phenomenon is a sign that the rite has been efficacious and has helped the dead in its journey from the world to the afterlife. It is in this respect not only a rite of separation but also that of incorporation.

Summary:

Two instances of spirit possession in connection with the rites of death were discussed in this Chapter. The first is at the carrying of *agere* drums used for the celebration of the rite of *ẹkún òwúrọ̀*, and the second is at the celebration of the rite of *èṣọ́ gbígbé*. The two instances of possession discussed here are classic spirit possession cases and the possessed are not spirit mediums. They were possessed by the dead and did not pass any message to people around.

For the celebration of the rite of *ẹkún òwúrọ̀*, the *àgèrè* drums and other musical instruments kept in the house of the *ìyàálé* have to be moved to the ritual site. Two women are selected to do this. Any two women may be chosen if they are: from that branch of the lineage hosting the celebration; hot-headed, hot tempered and unruly; or if they are barren or have had abortions or stillborns. Whether the women were possessed or not, their problems are believed to be solved by their participation in the rites.

During the singing of songs by women who follow the carriers of the drums, the carriers may become possessed by the dead. Music is thus one of the stimuli which can easily bring about possession. The singing women support

the possessed women and move them on until they reach the ritual site, where the drums are put on the ground. Water may be poured on their heads and palm oil may be forced into their mouths to make them regain consciousness.

The possessed women cannot remember what had happened to them during the period of their dissociation. This type of possession cannot be explained in terms of deprivation. These celebrations bring together members of the lineage, help to consolidate the relationship between them and improve their communication. People's attention will be drawn to the women's situation. Various suggestions and advice may be given to them. They are also believed to benefit from the possession itself.

At the rite of *Ẹ̀sọ́ gbígbé* celebrated by members of the Ẹ̀sọ́ Ìkòyí lineages, the beating of drums by *dùndún* drummers and the singing by members of the lineage precipitate the onset of spirit possession. Up to five people may be possessed at the same time. *Ẹ̀sọ́* or the spirit of the dead is said to have mount them. Possession may last from ten to thirty minutes. To help the possessed regain consciousness, palm oil, blood from the cock or the hen may be put into their mouths and the drumming may be stopped.

Weapons are taken away from the possessed so that they may not attack people with them if the fiery god, Ògún, should also possess them. Those possessed at the rite of *èṣọ́ gbígbé* too cannot remember what has happened to them. The possession is a sign that the ritual has been acceptable to the ancestors and that the dead can safely get to heaven, if he or she was an aged person.

In the next Chapter, Women and bereavement in Ile-Ife will be analyzed.

Endnotes:

1. Although I observed the process of possession in the celebration of the rite of *ẹkún òwúrọ̀*, I also interviewed several women (who are wives of male members of Àdàgbá lineage, Ile-Ifẹ) on various days between 2nd June and 30th September, 1989.

2. My main informants on this rite are Pa Bamidele Akinwande, Mr 'Dosu Akinwande and Mrs 'Dekẹ Akinwande of Jàgùdù Compound, Ile-Ifẹ. They were interviewed on various days between 3rd and 28th August, 1990 at Ilọrọ, Ile-Ifẹ.

3. On possession by the divinities, see M. Drewal's account (1992:182-186) and Verger (in Beattie and Middleton, ed., 1969:50-68).

[4]. *Adósù* means "one who has received in her head, the ball of medicine, or *osu*, that signifies the deity". (Margaret Drewal 1992:182). See also Barber 1990:335.

[5]. Verger *ibid*, p.65 defines the *òsù* as "a little ball, the size of a nut, made of several ingredients (leaves, blood of sacrificed animals amd minerals).

[6]. As M. Drewal puts it, "..the deity is installed on their heads". (*ibid*, p. 182). See also Verger 1963:16 & 18.

[7]. We also find incidence of possession in the Pentecostal Christian Churches in Ile-Ifẹ where men and women, but most especially women, are regularly possessed. Possession is usually induced when active singing and clapping are engaged in. In most instances, the songs rendered are those used to seek for the "coming of the Holy Spirit". Those possessed are usually those who have been baptized in those Churches. By this, we mean, total physical immersion in a running stream. They point out that that was the example given by Jesus Christ, when he was baptized in River Jordan by John the Baptist. Total immersion at baptism seems to be the Pentecostal equivalent of making an *òsù*.

[8]. In other forms of possession, such as that by the divinity Ọ̀bàtálá, the water from the snail may also be poured into the possessed's mouth. (Bascom 1980:10).

[9]. Possession by Ògún is possible only if possession by Èsó/the dead persists. The possessed then become violent.

CHAPTER 11.

WOMEN AND BEREAVEMENT IN ILE-IFE.

When a death takes place, the bereaved has to mourn the death of the person. Mourning has been described by Sigmund Freud as "...the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as fatherland, liberty, an ideal, and so on" (1956:153). In Ile-Ifẹ and in Yorubaland generally, mourning is known as *ọ̀fọ̀*. (Abraham 1958:506).[1] Before we proceed to discuss the types and features of mourning, there is the need to say a word on the respective position that men and women occupy in urban Yoruba society.

It is a patrilineal and patriarchal society and the men direct and control the affairs of the family and the lineage. The women (wives and daughters) compulsorily have to follow the instructions of the head of the family who is the husband and father to them all. All domestic work is done by women and these include cooking, washing, sweeping, childcare and other chores.[2] Men do not generally involve themselves in the performance of these chores even if they are at home. They will rather relax and read the daily newspapers if

educated or go out to play *ayo* game if uneducated.[3] But there is the general acceptance that men should feed their families and educate their children or put them into craft training. Most men are farmers and craftsmen while some are traders and civil servants. The women are mainly traders (Sudarkasa 1973:76): a large number being petty traders while a few are big-time businesswomen and are therefore very wealthy. Even if a woman is rich, she should still respect her husband and treat him with some deference. (Domenico *et al*, p.122). Above all, she should continue to live with him and cook for him.

Mourning is a form of social conduct or activity. There is a distinction between mourning as social activity or conduct on the one hand, and mourning when it is engaged in as a culturally prescribed activity. This difference is essentially the one we find between grieving and mourning. Grieving (the inner state) is something someone experiences; something people experience in themselves. People grieve when other people say they shouldn't, *e.g.* we shall come across in this chapter, the wife who couldn't express her grief at the death of her husband. She could mourn, but she could not grieve openly. But "mourning" (the outer behaviour) is the way in which other people, particularly sympathizers

and close relatives, take grieving from the bereaved and turn it into a pattern of behaviour. When viewed in this sense, the bereaved not only grieve but also mourn openly for the death of a loved one. In this chapter, mourning (with the inclusion of grieving) will be examined in a broad way.

Mourning also falls into the category of tasks which women undertake. It is women who mourn the dead in Yorubaland and in Ile-Ifẹ. This is a universal practice which is found in other cultures such as: the Greeks (Danforth 1982:119); the Spanish Basque people in Murelaga (Douglass 1969); and the Merina of Madagascar (Bloch 1971; 1982:215). But this is not to say that Yoruba men do not mourn at all. They do within certain limits but it is not apparent and they cannot be differentiated from men who are not bereaved. But why is mourning the prerogative of women? Bloch has answered this question accurately when he described mourning as:

"...self-punishment implying that the death is to a certain extent the mourner's fault for which a woman atones.." (1982:215).

When asked about the reason why women are in this position, people in Ifẹ give reasons such as, "women give birth to children, they are expected to be much more

sympathetic"; "women are our mothers" and "children are closer to their mothers than to their fathers". But Durkheim's explanation, like that of Bloch, seems more convincing : women carry the burden of mourning simply because "they have a smaller social value" and are treated as "scapegoats". (1968:401). People in Ifẹ, however, do not accept that this is the reason why women are the principal participants at mourning.

We shall discuss the different "atonements" which a woman makes but before then we will give an outline of the different types of mourning.

The Different Types of Mourning:

There are about four types of bereavement in Ile-Ife and they are as follows: Parent-Child, Conjugal, Fraternal and Kin bereavement. Here we have adopted the method of analysis used by Goody (1962:91f) as this classification can be found among the Ife just as they are found among the Lodagaa. These types of bereavement will be discussed with reference to mourning rites.

Parent-Child Bereavement: When a parent dies, the children may mourn him or her by weeping and wailing, especially if they are still young, in school or learning a craft and are still dependent on the parent for

survival. The second reason why the children may mourn the parent's death may be because of the fact that he or she has died too young, considering the fact that a person aged fifty is still regarded as a young person. They therefore lament the fact that he or she has not reaped the fruits of his or her work. Their realisation that the future is bleak (because of the death of the breadwinner) makes their sorrow become great. Although the parent might have been a very charitable person who entertained all and sundry during his /her life, all the beneficiaries may not turn up to help the children in their times of need. The Yoruba and the Ife recognize this problem and it is reflected in one of their sayings:

"Ẹsẹ̀ gìrì nílé Ańjọ̀fẹ́,
Ańjọ̀fẹ́ kú,
A ò mà r'ẹ́nìkan".

"Lots of people mill around,
In the house of he/she who provides free food,
He/she who provides free food dies,
None of the beneficiaries are seen again".[4]

After a few days of weeping and crying, the children are successfully consoled and they usually stop crying. Their

mourning thus ends there. Nothing else is required of them but they have to remain sober for days.

On the other hand, when a child dies the parents are thrown into serious grief. One of the things that is feared most is the death of children before their parents as it strikes a blow at the efforts of the parents to perpetuate the lineage and threatens to make the funeral of the parents that of paupers. It also exposes the parents to suffering in their old age as the children are supposed to care for them then. We should remember that there are no old people's homes and no social security benefit system in the community. (Lloyd 1975:191). It is the children who provide all the necessary support in times of old age. These are the reasons for the grief.

The younger the child, the less intense is the grief and conversely, the older the child, the more pronounced the grief. The reverse is the case among the Lodagaa. (Goody 1962:91). The reason for this is the fact that the Ife believe that a younger child has not acquired a personality of its own and has not been totally socialized into the community. Besides, the expenses incurred on him/her are still minimal. The mother therefore mourns the death of the younger child if an

infant for seven days, and if a young child for twenty-one days. She does this by weeping, crying and singing laments composed with the praise poem (*oríkì*) of the child. She may not eat for a day and she is expected to remain unwashed for about three days. There the mourning ritual comes to an end. She may then bath and put on another dress. We should note that she does not wear black dresses during the period of mourning but she may not change her dress in the middle of the mourning period. As for the child's father, he does not weep and does not observe any mourning rite. It is not unusual for him to stay indoors for one day after which he is expected to go to work.

But when an older child dies, the mourning is much more intense. An older child in this context may range from age fifteen to about twenty-two. The mourning is also marked by weeping and generalized wailing by the mother, relatives and other sympathizers. The mother may avoid food for days and is expected to stay indoors for about twenty-one days. She is also required to wear black dresses. Black is the colour of death and mourning among the Yoruba, but this is also a universal phenomenon. To put it bluntly, "black is the symbolic colour of death". (Douglass 1969:57; Huntington & Metcalf 1979:45 and

Lawal 1974:246). For example, we can find this in rural Greece (Danforth 1982:11,54-55) and in Murelaga (Douglass 1969:57). It is interesting to note that in Alto Minho, black is worn as an item of protection from the evil influences brought about by death. In a similar way in Ifẹ, the black dresses protect the women from *ebúrú*, the restless spirits associated with death. The father may weep privately but he is not expected to do this publicly as he is required by custom to remain stoic. The situation is similar to that of Murelaga where men may not weep (Douglass 1969:23) and Athens where it was the convention for men to "maintain self-control in mourning whereas women were encouraged to display wild grief". (Humphreys 1983:86). He does not wear black clothes but he is expected to sit at home for about seven days for the purpose of receiving sympathizers. He too may not wash for about three days. All these restrictions and practices will be discussed in full later on.

When the offspring is an adult, this is the kind of bereavement at which the grief is the most intense. All the mourning processes above are repeated and above all, the black mourning dress is worn by the mother for the period of one year. The father may weep privately but he does not mourn and is homebound and restricted for about

seven days. He does not wear black clothes. The two parents also refrain from dancing, playing games and celebrating joyous festivals. They thus refrain "from participating in recreational activities". (Douglass 1969:49).

The end of mourning is marked by the shedding of black dresses by the mother and the resumption of social intercourse with people in the community. But she is expected to be restrained in the level of her participation and is still required to be sober for some time. The main difference between the mourning practices adopted by parents and children is that parents are required to mourn their children by engaging in those practices, children are not under any obligation to mourn their parents and in practice do not do so in the strict sense of the term. Goody (1962:92) has described this relationship as an "unbalanced system". No matter how young the parent is, an offspring in Ile-Ife will still thank God that he or she has survived/outlived the parent.

Conjugal Bereavement: How the death of a wife is mourned by the husband depends on the situation of his household. In a monogamous relationship, the loss is more deeply

felt by the husband as he has lost his only partner and has been left to look after the children alone. This is expressed in crying, weeping and wailing. He does not wear black clothes but he may not eat for some time. He may wash but he usually keeps on the same clothes for several days. He is also required to stay indoors for about twenty days to receive sympathizers. As a man, he is not expected to weep for days; he usually stops the day after the wife is buried. The custom is not rigidly followed. If it was to be followed strictly, the man will not weep at all. He is expected to bear his burden with some dignity.

In a polygynous relationship, the husband feels the loss of the deceased wife but he is consoled by the fact that there are other available wives in the household. He weeps as is the custom and stays indoors for twenty days to receive sympathizers. He does not wear black dresses but he refrains from participating in any joyful celebration. Whereas the widow is not permitted any sexual access, the widower can have sexual intercourse with any of his wives or mistresses at any time during the period of mourning. In fact, this is regarded as one of the ways in which the man may be helped to come to terms with his loss.

For the widower in the monogamous and polygynous relationships, mourning comes to an end on the twenty-first day. The widower pays a visit to his in-laws' house at about five o'clock in the morning. He stays outside the house, weeps and chants the praise-poem of his wife and subsequently leaves for his house. This marks the formal end of his mourning. He is free to go about his work or travel to his farm.

When the husband dies, the wife immediately enters the period of mourning and becomes a widow, *opó*. Rt. Rev. Ajayi Crowther described this state as "*ille-aweh*", "the house of fasting". (in McKenzie 1976a:101). The reference to fasting here is to the food abstinence practised by widows for the first day after the death and to the fact that widows do not eat much on subsequent days. (Lucas 1948:226). The widow is also expected to wail and weep loudly; this goes on all day long as she is expected to join relatives and sympathizers as they arrive and start a fresh bout of weeping. This is repeated day after day. The widow also wears black dresses specially sewn for mourning and keeps this on for one year. She also leaves her hair untidy and does not plait it. She does not bath and refrains from participating in celebrations which are happy ones. (Kayode 1986:57).[5] She does not engage in

dancing. (Johnson 1921:115f; Ellis 1894:156). It is in connection with her abstention from dancing that the Yoruba have a saying: "the widow does not dance; do not beat the drums for the one who walks differently". The widow walks differently because of her clearly distinguished dress, her experience of death and current state of mourning. She refrains from dancing until her period of mourning - one year - has passed. Most importantly, she refrains from having sexual intercourse with any man. They are restricted to the inside of the house so as to enforce this sexual rule. (Crowther, in MCKenzie 1976a:101). The first part of mourning rites ends on the twenty-first day after death when the widows with their female siblings and some wives of the lineage pay visits to relatives and sympathizers thanking them for their help. The second part of mourning starts on the twenty-second day when the widows may bath and go about their work. This bath is a rite of purification performed to cleanse them of dirt, and prepare them for inheritance by the sons of the deceased husband or his male siblings. The Lodagaa also practise this ritual bathing for the same purpose. (Goody 1962:40). A detailed description of this Ife practice will be made later on.

The second part of the mourning rites ends one year after death when the rite of "shaving the widow's head" described earlier is celebrated and the black clothes are shed. This is the formal end of mourning.

The Roles of Relatives before and during Mourning

The relatives are responsible for breaking the news of the death of a young person to the deceased's parents. A lot of common sense is used here. The news of the death is not broken to the parents until a large number of relatives are around. They can help to restrain the parents from harming themselves when the news is broken to them. About two of the relatives start off by informing the parents of their child's illness. They then emphasize that the illness is serious. This is to prepare them for the bombshell. They then break the news. Other relatives come in at this point to restrain the parents. This practice is also universally observed in rural Greece where common-sense and great tact is also used when breaking the news of death to parents. (Danforth 1982:13). In Ile-Ife, a doctor or nurse may be brought in to inject the parents with tranquillizers which will make them sleep instantly. That breaking of the news marks the start of mourning by everyone concerned.

A number of close relatives and friends immediately move to the house of the bereaved. They live there for eight days for two reasons. Firstly, to ensure that the bereaved are not overcomed by the fear of the dead and the situation of death. Secondly, they do that to prevent the bereaved from sleeping alone and thinking solely about the situation. If the relatives are financially capable, they will help the bereaved with the provision of food and other material needs although it is the responsibility of the bereaved to feed them. Other friends and relatives also send cooked food and raw food to the bereaved. Some others give the bereaved gifts of money.

On the eighth day after burial, most of the relatives and friends go back to their homes. The obligation to stay with the bereaved until the twenty-first day then falls on the siblings of the bereaved, if they are women. Those relatives and friends who left on the eighth day also pay visits to the bereaved everyday, every other day or periodically. By doing this, a sense of "corporate solidarity" and "corporate responsibility" is shown. (Schwab 1955:358).

Death Pollution and the Image of the Widow

When the Yoruba want to state that a place is polluted, they say "the *ebúrú*/the spirits have filled up" the place, or they may say that the place is "full of *ìyọ̀*". *Ìyọ̀* here are the microscopic organisms which cause itching and discomfort to fowls and man in the poultry. When *iyo* is used here, it refers to the "spirits" which have made the house of the deceased a dangerous place. It has been made a polluted place. Anybody who goes there might become polluted. There is thus this notion of contagion.

When a death takes place, the house of the deceased becomes polluted. This belief is not only found among the Ifẹ but could also be found among the Greeks in earlier times (Parker 1983:35), in the Cantonese society (Watson 1982:155-186) and among the Lugbara of Uganda. (Middleton 1955:200). What made the house polluted are the restless spirits who moved into the house at the time of death and remained until purification was performed. These spirits known as *ebúrú* are the harbingers of illness, bad fortune and death. Whoever pays a visit to the house of the deceased becomes contaminated by this pollution.[6] This accounts for the refusal of some people to pay visits (as

sympathizers) to the bereaved if the deceased was a young person and if the potential sympathizer has been advised against paying this visit by a prophet of one of the independent churches. Occasionally, this advice is extended to cover attendance at the burial and funeral of the old. At times, these prophecies and visions delivered to people may be solicited or unsolicited. Times without number, people have been accosted on the city's streets and informed of these types of prophecies and visions without their seeking for spiritual advice. Once a person has been informed of this prophecy, he or she accepts that the house of the bereaved is a polluting place. He or she therefore avoids being contaminated by the "atmosphere of death" which so much dominate the house of the bereaved.

Stories have been related in Ifẹ about people who payed visits to the bereaved after having been warned not to do so. In 1989, a woman was reported to have been eating in the house of the mourners when she collapsed and died instantly. That same year, a man also died in similar circumstances. In anthropological literature, we usually find that prescribed restitutions or purification are made to restore the polluted person back to his or her previous condition. (Mary Douglas 1975:54). But in

Ile-Ifẹ, there is the belief that once a person becomes polluted in this way, there is usually no restitution to bring him back to a pure, clean state. Avoidance is thus the best option to follow. These abstentions cause a lot of problems in families and lineages whenever there are reported deaths. The mourners who are not payed visits feel sad and complain that their relatives have abandoned them in their time of crisis. Their relationship thus becomes strained. In fact, there is a usual realignment of their relationship. They may become less friendly and less helpful towards each other. After the stipulated period of abstention, the person becomes free again to attend the funeral of the young and visit mourners. It is important to state that in most cases, these proscriptions from the prophets do not usually include visits to and attendance at the funeral of the old.

It is interesting to compare the situation of death pollution in Ile-Ifẹ to that of the ancient Greeks and the Cantonese. (Parker 1983:35-39 & Watson 1982:157-159 respectively). While mourners and sympathizers may be contaminated by the spirits, *ebúrú,* which roam about the house of the bereaved in Ile-Ifẹ, sympathizers may become polluted by "touching a corpse" or "entering the same roof" or by just belonging to the same lineage with the

dead among the early Greeks. (Parker 1983:39-40). But it is the Cantonese situation which is very similar to the Ifẹ belief. All the sympathizers who enter the house of the dead become polluted by the "killing airs" which comes out of the corpse at the time of death. (Watson 1982:157-158). These "killing airs" are invisible just like the spirits, *eburu*, which contaminate the mourners and sympathizers in Ile-Ifẹ. But there is a difference in the two belief systems. Whereas the personal effects of the dead including clothing are believed to be heavily polluted among the Cantonese (Watson 1982:169), the Ife do not believe that the personal effects and the clothing of the deceased are contaminated. In fact, the personal properties of the dead may be used by wives and children during the period of mourning.

In Ile-Ifẹ, widows are believed to be contaminated not only by the restless spirits, *ebúrú* but also by the "dirt" from their husbands. This dirt was received by them in the form of the sweat and semen of their husbands during sexual intercourse. (Goody 1962:59). Goody stresses that this dirt is dangerous for the receiver. It is also believed by the Ifẹ that it may be passed from the widow to the man who inherits her or to a new suitor.[7] If this dirt is passed to a man, he may then

become an easy prey to witches. (Goody, ibid). To avoid this, some men shy away from inheriting widows especially if they (the men) have not been married before. They expressed the view that they do not want to "lay the foundation" of their married life with widows. That is to say that widows should not become their first wives.[8] It is because of this pollution or dirt which can open the bearer to witches' attack that these men reject the widows allocated to them.[9] The shadow of death of the husband still looms over the woman. She is therefore not the ideal wife for a bachelor. As early as 1955, Schwab (p.366) notes that "the rule of widow inheritance is increasingly disregarded". It is in this connection that the Ife people use the following saying in general speech: "You have just inherited a widow; you are moving your hips in a provocating manner. Do you think that the cause of her husband's death was his inability to move his hips in such a way?" This is an indirect warning to the prospective husband. He should watch out, for the cause of the former husband's death might lie with the wife.

Besides, the situation is a bit complicated in Ile-Ife as some people might have already suspected the widow of having killed the husband with witchcraft. Lekan

Oyegoke writing about the witch in his novel Laughing Shadows puts it clearly:

"...Often her husband is dead since a witch needs a man only to mate with her and live long enough to build her and her children a house. After he has given her the children she wants and built her a house which she can inherit, she terminates his life. Her husband dies suddenly, under strange and unnatural circumstances. So the witch becomes a matronly overseer directing her inheritance and the lives of her children". (1984:90-91).

So, the widow is seen as a polluted being who may also be a witch responsible for the deceased husband's death. Because she is a witch, she may desperately want to have sexual intercourse with men so as to pass the dirt to them and afflict them with illness or misfortune by her powers of witchcraft. (Raymond Prince 1964:92-93).

Although these are the beliefs; in practice most widows help the new husbands and make sure that they fall into no harm. But why? Were the husband to fall sick and die, people will refer to the fact that the widow has had two husbands and has killed them in quick succession.

Widows have to wait for one year before engaging in sexual intercourse if they are to marry suitors of their choice outside the family. But if they were inherited by

the deceased's siblings or sons, they can resume sexual activities after the first two months of the death.

It is generally acknowledged that it is a bit difficult to manage a widow as a wife in a domestic setting. She will always nag and refer to the fact that the deceased was a better carer, although during the deceased's lifetime, the widow might not have appreciated his gesture. Hence the Yoruba say that "the widow always praises the deceased husband".[10] What this means is that the husband's good work is only realized after death. This portends the same treatment for the new husband.

But the widow is in a difficult situation herself. She cannot pick up quarrels with the new man (if inherited) if she is not satisfied with any situation; the other wives of the man will accuse her of trying to kill their husband just as she has killed her first husband. She therefore endures injustice and foul play with little or no means of redress. In fact, it is because of this absence of fair play that increasing number of widows in Ife voluntarily remain uninherited or opt out of the husband's lineage entirely and marry men of their choice in the city of Ife or elsewhere.

The widows share out the pollution of death at the end of the one-year mourning period by giving their black

dresses to beggars as gifts.[11] By accepting these dresses, the beggars take on the pollution of death. Widows do not keep these dresses at home because it is believed that more deaths may take place in the family if they do so and that the home may become permanently polluted. It is interesting to note that death pollution is shared in a similar way in the Cantonese society. Watson notes that contaminated coins and wine are offered to sympathizers thus helping with the dispersal of death pollution. (1982:169).[12]

On a final note, we need to state that the rites of purification which marks the end of mourning are essentially those of bathing, "shaving the widow's head" and the giving out of the black dresses.

Fraternal Bereavement:

When a sibling dies, the brothers and sisters have to mourn the death for some time. Whereas the sisters are expected to mourn for twenty-one days and stay indoors to weep and receive sympathizers, the brothers receive sympathizers for only seven days. Siblings are not expected to wear black dresses. The roles which siblings play have greatly diminished since they are no longer permitted to inherit the properties of the deceased. Yet

they are still expected to buy the coffin with which the dead is buried.

Female siblings may not wear expensive clothes and may not participate in recreational activities or attend parties several months after the death. Male siblings may relax these rules as they are not expected to mourn for a long time.

Kin Bereavement: When a relative dies, custom requires that all blood relation should pay daily visits if possible to the home of the dead to weep, and share the burden of grief. But if the relationship is a distant one, the relative is not obliged to pay daily visits; just two or three visits may be enough. A gift of money may be given to the bereaved to help with his or her subsistence during the period of mourning. It is the donation of a burial shroud which is the most important gesture, as it is done to maintain the relationship between different sets of relatives and the bereaved.

Purpose and Characteristics of Mourning:

Mourning is performed as a mandatory obligation in most societies, especially as a debt payed to the dead. (Durkheim 1968:397 & Danforth 1982:124). But the main purpose of mourning are two-fold: to ensure the

satisfaction of the deceased and to make sure that the living are protected. (Virginia Kerns 1980:130). The deceased is satisfied if all the rites are correctly performed. The dead will then leave the living alone and not resort to troubling them and may even help protect the living with the powers acquired and developed as a spirit. This accounts for the prayers which sympathizers in Ifẹ say to the bereaved at the end of a visit: "..the deceased will protect you and will not frighten you".[13]

But what are the characteristics of mourning? Most of these are universal in many cultures but among the Ifẹ, the specific ones include the following.

There is always great wailing and loud weeping at mourning (Middleton 1982:148; Danforth 1982:12; Kerns 1980:130; Pina-Cabral 1986:219; Bloch 1982:214; Watson 1982:160; Monica Wilson 1957:21 and Radcliffe-Brown 1964:117). Among the Yoruba and in Ile-Ife, death is not the only occasion at which ceremonial weeping is expressed. Marriages, moments of separation of members of the family and moments of reunion are other occasions.

When marriages are celebrated, the brides have to move to the husbands' homes as the virilocal system of residence is the norm. (Fadipe 1970:135; Eades 1980:52). It is because of the pain of this separation that the

mother of the bride and sometimes her female siblings weep on the day she leaves home. This action is also a farewell; a way of saying "goodbye" to the bride and a demonstration of affinity. (Radcliffe-Brown 1964:240 and Barber 1991:105-116). The mother's tears are those of private grieving rather than public grief.

People also weep when a member of the family prepares to depart for a long journey. This weeping expresses the pain of separation, and the fact that the person will be missed for quite some time. It also shows the fears of the unknown: what may happen during the journey or at the traveller's destination, no one knows. Will they ever see themselves again? This is a worrying question on their minds. Most people engage in reciprocal weepings in the two instances cited above, that is marriages and departures. But in cases of reunions, weeping is not common except a lot of painful events have taken place since the parties last saw themselves. In such cases, the weeping is to express their feelings of joy at seeing each other and to say that despite all the troubles, God has brought them together again.

At mourning ceremonies, the bereaved and the sympathizers weep to show that the death and loss is deeply felt. Besides, there is the belief in Ile-Ifẹ that

the death of a younger person must be mourned as his age dictates, and that sympathizers too must mourn with the bereaved and condole them.

People also weep to bid the deceased farewell as it has to go on a journey. (Lucas 1948:224). Just as the traveller is sent off in a dramatic way, the dead is also accorded the same treatment. But the most important reason why the Yoruba in Ifẹ weep is, as they say "to help remove mourning (ọ̀fọ̀) from their bodies". This means that it is gradually used to remove the tension and the feelings which would have otherwise been "bottled-up" in the mourners. They will therefore remain healthy and not become ill. But were they to leave those feelings unexpressed, it is generally believed that they will fall sick and may even die. Let us give an actual example here. A man named Dapọ had three wives in Ile-Ifẹ. He died suddenly in 1984. Two of the wives wept as much as they could but the third wife who was also the deceased's favourite wife did not shed tears. She was as stoic as a man. But she died within a month of the husband's death. People in the city were not surprised. They remarked that she kept her tension and feelings inside her instead of expressing them through weeping. It was therefore

generally accepted that her death was a direct result of that action.

We should note that some women mourners and sympathizers do not have any success in weeping and shedding tears no matter how much effort they put into it. They just cry with no tears coming out of their eyes. People ridicule them behind their backs and some feel that the sympathy which these women express is not warm enough. But others acknowledge the fact that it is a bit difficult to shed tears for a deceased person who might be unknown to the sympathizer; one must be overcome by emotion before tears can flow freely. This may be lacking in this set of sympathizers.

When mourners weep, the main cries used vary. Some may shout "*Oró ò!*" which is a phrase expressing great pain and lamentation. Others in the group may shout "Ah, father!" or "Ah, mother!" according to the sex of the deceased parent. Others may yet shout "Ah, wife!", "Ah, husband!", "Ah, brother!" or "Ah, sister!". (Ajuwọn 1982:1). Some people may just shout "he is gone!" or "she is gone!" or "you did not say that you would do this!" (that is by way of address to the dead). Others simply shout the name of the deceased. These cries are usually rendered amidst loud weeping. (Dennett 1910:59). It is

this expression which Bloch has described as the emotion of "sorrow". (1982:214).[14]

The second characteristic of mourning is anger which is felt by the mourners. Anger is part of the public performance of mourning. In the first place, the anger is directed at people suspected to have caused the death of the person. (Huntington & Metcalf 1979:23; Durkheim 1965:446). In Ile-Ifẹ, these suspects may not be known by the mourners. The anger is a general one but it may be directed at certain people if these have had heated exchanges or quarrels with the deceased shortly before his death. In the second place, the anger stirs up a lot of questions in the mourners' minds: Why has this happened to us? Why has our son died? There are so many young men in the City of Ifẹ, why is it that it is this one who has to die? Why not any other person? What have we done wrong to deserve this? If God is a loving one, why has He not prevented this? The anger subsides after some months but it is not unusual for the bereaved to carry this anger with them for years.

The third characteristic of mourning in Ile-Ifẹ is the wearing of black dresses by female mourners. This feature can be found all over Africa and in the countries around the Mediterranean. (Bloch 1982:226; Danforth

1982:11,54-55; Douglass 1969:57-58). The wearing of black dresses is regarded as one of the personal mourning practices (Douglass, *ibid*) and it is the prerogative of women.

Sympathizers do not engage in this practice. We should note that black dresses are not worn by all mourners. It is restricted to the family of the dead: the mother and the wife/wives of a deceased man for example. The age of the deceased also determines whether black dresses will be worn or not. In Ile-Ifẹ, bereaved mothers do not wear black dresses when an infant dies.

Black dresses are worn to protect the mourners from the restless spirits, *ebúrú*, associated with illness, misfortune, affliction and death. Pina-Cabral describes a similar practice as being used to protect women "against the bad influence generated by death". (1986:220). In Ile-Ifẹ, it is thought that those spirits are unable to penetrate the black dresses and afflict the women mourners with illness, misfortune or death. The dresses are also worn to protect the mourners from the vexed spirit of the dead.

The dresses also marks mourners out to the society that they are in a polluted state and should be dealt with with some caution. In this way, widows are not taken

advantage of. In a similar way, it distinguishes women mourners from other people and separates them from the society at large. The reason for this is the fact that the mourners have recently had something to do with death, others have not. (Danforth 1982:55).

Up to about fifteen years ago, women mourners had to wear only black dresses in Ile-Ife. The position has shifted in recent years as some mourners now wear dresses with shades of blue instead of black. In the past, it also had to be black dresses, plain with no design or drawing. Nowadays, women mourners wear patterned blue dresses but the flowers and decorations still has to be in blue or black colours. Any bright colour such as red, green or yellow is unacceptable.

Another feature of mourning is the range of restrictions imposed and the observance of certain practices which can be described as ascetic. The main mourners are expected to stay indoors. This is especially so if they are women. But even then, they are never left alone. (Pina-Cabral 1986:221). There is the fear that they may injure themselves or try to commit suicide. Members of the extended family; other relatives; friends; members of the associations, societies and clubs to which they belong pay visits to them to condole them. After a

bout of weeping, they all talk about various topics. (Danforth 1982:11). These may range from the weather, to problems on the farms, to issues of child-raising, market problems or the problems of death and bereavement. The place is also rife with rumours of all kinds.

Mourners are also beset with the problem of giving the details of the deceased's illness and his/her last few days or weeks. They also give the details of how he died and when. This has been labelled a problem here because the mourners may have to go over this, to different sets of sympathizers, several times a day. This practice can also be found among the Greeks. (Danforth 1982:14).

In return, the sympathizers too have to console the mourners by relating the stories and life histories of mourners who have survived similar ordeals; and of people who would have been better dead than alive but who are alive and are insane and live on the streets. Thus, the sympathizers express the view that being dead is a better option than being insane and living on the streets, especially with the social disgrace involved. The mourners are therefore enjoined to accept this better option.

Mourners are also required by custom to withdraw from the general activities taking place in the neighbourhood and from all forms of merriment. (Pina-Cabral 1986:223; Douglass 1969:49 and 58; Watson 1982:165). If the mourners participate in such activities, it may be considered to be "recreational or frivolous". (Douglass 1969:58). These activities include dancing; singing; attendance at birth ceremonies, weddings and funerals; and participation in the playing of games.

Women mourners particularly must make sure that they do not look attractive during the period of mourning. (Bloch 1982:215). As a result, they do not bath for the first few days; they do not plait their hair; and they do not change their dresses for quite some time. (Johnson 1921:140; Pina-Cabral 1986:223 and Bloch 1982:215).

Men do not observe most of these restrictions and practices but they also refrain from participating in social activities for some time. They may also have on one type of dress for some days. After the first few days, men may resume their work and start to engage in social intercourse. Even then, they must be seen to be sober and reflective.

The Attitude of Mourners.

We shall now discuss the attitude of mourners throughout the period of mourning and how this changes. (Geertz 1975:110). When a death first occurs, mourners in Ile-Ifẹ like mourners all over Yorubaland, find it very difficult to believe that their relative is dead. It is the celebration and the performance of the various rites of mourning which confirms that the death has really taken place. But they still wonder if what has taken place is real or not. There is the hope that the dead will come back to life either as a grandchild or will migrate to live another lifetime in another town (that is become an *àkúdàáyà*). This stage of mourning is what Danforth has described as the denial of "the finality of death". (1982:139). Clifford Geertz describes this stage as the period when a person has a religious attitude. (1975:110).

In the second stage of mourning, the mourner's attitude changes from the religious to the common-sense one. (Geertz 1975:111). Mourners are helped to realise that the death has really taken place and that they have to accept it. The visits and the discussion between the current mourners and former mourners actually help the

present mourners to see that it is futile to believe that the death has not taken place. They therefore accept that the death has taken place and put a stop to the denial. (Danforth 1982:139; and Geertz 1975:111). They therefore adjust to the situation. This same process has been summarized by Goody when he divided the stages into three: from grief to resignation to acceptance. (1962:122). Goody has described this process as a "routinization of grief" or "a systematization of mourning". (1962:122). The mourners try to lead a normal life after this.

Summary:

Mourning is one of the tasks which women undertake in Ile-Ife and Yorubaland. There are different types of bereavement: Parent-Child; Conjugal; Fraternal; and Kin bereavement.

Children mourn their parent by weeping and wailing. They lament because the deceased did not reap the fruits of his/her work, if the parent was not old. The children remain sober for days. But when a child dies, the parents are sticken with grief. The younger the child, the less intense the grief and conversely, the older the child,

the more pronounced the grief. An older child is in the fifteen to twenty-two age range.

The mother mourns the death of the younger child if an infant for seven days, and if a young child for twenty-one days. She does this by weeping, crying and singing laments composed with the praise poem (*oríkì*) of the child. She avoids food for a day and does not bath for three days. There the mourning ends. The father does not weep and does not observe any mourning rite.

At the death of an older child, the mother assisted by relatives, co-wives, friends and sympathizers weep and wail. The mother is required to stay indoors for days and wears black clothes because black is the symbolic colour of death. The black dresses protect mourners from the *ebúrú*, the restless spirits associated with death. The father remains stoic and does not wear black clothes. The end of mourning is marked by the shedding of bl̂ck clothes by the mother and the resumption of social intercourse with people in the community.

When a wife dies, the husband cries, weeps and wails. He does not wear black clothes but keeps on the same clothes for several days. He is expected to bear his burden with some dignity. Mourning comes to an end on the twenty-first day. But when a husband dies, the widow

starts intense mourning immediately. This is manifested by wailing and loud weeping. This is repeated all daylong, day after day. The widow wears black dresses for one year. She leaves her hair untidy and does not bath. The first part of the mourning rituals ends on the twenty-first day after death when the widow pays thank-you visits to sympathizers and relatives. The second part of the mourning rites ends one year after death when the rite of "shaving the widow's head" is celebrated and black clothes are shed. This marks the formal end of mourning.

Relatives break the news of death to parents and help restrain the parents. A few close relatives and friends move to the house of the bereaved and ensure that the bereaved are not overcomed by the fear of the dead. They also discourage the bereaved from worrying about the situation.

When a death takes place, the house of the bereaved becomes polluted with the restless spirits, *ebúrú*. They are the harbingers of illness, bad fortune and death. Sympathizers may be contaminated by these spirits. There is the belief that once a person becomes polluted in this way, there is usually no restitution to bring him to a

pure state. To avoid contamination, a few people refrain from paying visits to mourners.

In Ile-Ife, widows are believed to be contaminated not only by the restless spirits, but also by the *dirt* from their husbands. To avoid catching the dirt, some young men refuse to inherit widows. Besides, the widow might have been suspected of having killed the husband with witchcraft.

The widows share out the pollution of death at the end of the one-year mourning period by giving their black dresses to beggars as gifts. The rites of purification which mark the end of mourning are those of bathing, "shaving the widow's head", and the giving out of black dresses.

Siblings may mourn each other but they are not expected to wear black clothes. They refrain from attending parties for some time. When a relative dies, burial shrouds are donated by all blood relatives and visits are paid to the bereaved.

The purpose of mourning are to ensure the satisfaction of the deceased and to make sure that the living are protected. The characteristics of mourning are wailing and weeping; anger which is felt by the mourners; the wearing of black dresses by female mourners; a set of

restrictions and the observance of certain ascetic practices; the giving of details of the last few weeks of the deceased by mourners and the consoling of the mourners by the sympathizers.

The attitude of mourners throughout the period of mourning changes from the religious to the common-sense one. In the religious stage, the mourners find it difficult to believe that their relative is dead. The celebration of the various rites of mourning confirms that the death has really taken place. In the second stage of mourning, the mourners adopt a common-sense perspective. They put a stop to the denial.

Endnotes:

[1]. Except otherwise indicated, the data contained in this chapter were collected from several informants at Ile-Ifẹ between June and October 1989, August and September 1990.

[2]. Domenico *et al* 1987:128.

[3]. See Lloyd (1975:177-178; Drewal & Drewal 1990:53) for marital roles among the Yoruba.

[4]. Mr M. Adekunle Adeyẹba, Personal communication on 21st June, 1989 at Ile-Ifẹ.

[5]. On similar restrictions on widows among the Ibibio of Southern Nigeria, see D.A. Talbot (1968:225).

[6]. There is a similar belief among the Lugbara. (Middleton *ibid*).

[7]. The belief that death pollution can be transferred mystically from the widow to any man through sexual intercourse can also be found among the Nyoro. (Beattie 1961:179), and the South-East Bantu (Gluckman 1937:122-123). In these societies, purification ceremonies include the obligation on the widows to engage in sexual acts to help cleanse them. Only strange men are seduced and in the Nyoro situation, the man may die.

[8]. The practice of widow inheritance can also be found among the Nnobis of Igboland. (Amadiume 1987:83).

[9]. This point has been expressed clearly by Douglas: "A polluting person is always in the wrong. He has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone". (1970:136). See also Kilson (1976:136).

[10]. Informant: Late Mr J. Adebisi Adegoke of Àdàgbá Compound, Personal communication, on 2nd July 1978 at Ile-Ifẹ.

[11]. In Melanesia and among the Australian Indians, widows too change their clothes to mark the end of mourning. (Bendann 1930:133).

[12]. We also note a similar practice among West African Muslims, whereby the giving of alms to the poor and helping to pay the debts of the dead are compulsory obligations which relatives of the dead must undertake. These, as Trimingham (1959:180) notes, help to remove the pollution of death and ensure that the dead rests in peace.

[13]. Informant: Mrs Tẹ́níadé Makinde of Igbó Ìtàpá Compound, Ile-Ifẹ. Personal communication on 31st August, 1979.

[14]. Wailing and the rendering of a "melancholy dirge" are also important features of mourning rites among the Tallensi. (Fortes 1962:62-63).

CHAPTER 12.

CHANGES IN FUNERAL RITES OF THE IFẸ.

There has been many changes in the celebration of funeral rites by the Ifẹ people. Some of these changes were brought about by economic factors, modernity, the growth and proliferation of white and blue collar jobs in South-western Nigeria and the influence of Christianity and Islam. In this chapter, we shall discuss the changes, how and why they were brought about, and the impact of the Pentecostal Churches, Mosques and modern Islamic movements on the performance of funeral rites in Ile-Ifẹ. Some of these changes were gradual and took place over a long period of time, others are recent changes which were unavoidable due to the circumstances of the people.

The Changes: The first change is in the offering of the fare-fowl *(adìyẹ ìràǹà); adìyẹ ìsáa-ọkọ́*, the fowl of the hoe used for digging the grave; goats and sheep at burials, funerals and commemoration. In the nineteenth century, there was an elaborate system of the offering of fowls, goats and sheep. Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther in "The Funeral Customs of the Yoruba, 1844", reproduced in McKenzie (1976a:98) describes the fare-fowl, *adìyẹ ìràǹà* as the fowl to purchase the way". There is the belief

among the Yoruba that the dead needs to send ahead a fowl to the hereafter as sacrifice to pave the way for its journey. It is also believed that it physically leads the dead to the afterlife. At the time when Crowther wrote that article, the fowl was slaughtered, roasted and eaten outside the town. As recently as 1962, Idowu notes that the fowl was slaughtered and eaten in the compound of the dead. (p.190). But in modern times in Ile-Ifẹ, the fowl is not slaughtered at some burial ceremonies. The tradition is continued only in lineages where the traditional religion is very much practised. The decline of this practice can be traced to the influence of Christianity and Islam in the city of Ifẹ.

Also at the time of Crowther in the middle of the nineteenth century (c. 1844), the usual practice was for the body to be placed in the grave and for another fowl to be slaughtered with the hoe used for digging the grave. Its blood was then dripped on the corpse before it was covered up with laterite. The name given to this fowl is *adìyẹ ìsaá-ọkọ́*, "a fowl to be snatched against the hoe which was employed in digging the grave". (McKenzie 1976a:98). This tradition is no longer in practice in Ile-Ifẹ. Only the old can remember that it was a common practice up to the early 1950s.

Many goats and sheep were immolated at burials and funerals in the past, in the nineteenth century up to the late 1950s and early 1960s. Even now, these animals are still slaughtered at funerals but for different purposes. Crowther (1844 in McKenzie 1976a:99-100) notes that at least three goats were slaughtered. The first goat, or a ram if the deceased was female was slaughtered at the death of the old and left outside. It was called *ẹran àgbàsun*, which means "a creature to lie at the side of ". This was offered to celebrate the companionship between a pet and the deceased. The second goat was slaughtered at the entrance of the house. At a later period, the custom was for this to be offered to drummers. (Crowther ibid, p.100). This practice has been discontinued. Drummers are entertained nowadays by the children and relatives of the dead just like any other guests. The third goat was slaughtered on the grave and the blood was dripped on the body in the grave[1]. This Crowther referred to as "*errhan-kponga*" or *ẹran awusanlẹ* which means "the goat of the frame". (*ibid, p.100*). There are three reasons why this was done.

Firstly, it was seen as a befitting farewell to the dead, and a way of seeking his or her protection. This

ceremony has been described by Idowu as "entering into a covenant with the deceased". (1962:190).

Secondly, the immolation of the goat is a means of separating the living from the dead and sending him peacefully on his way to the hereafter. (de Heusch 1985:82). In other words, it makes his departure easier.

Thirdly, the body is sprinkled with the blood as an appeasement to *Èsù Ẹlẹ́gbáa*, the trickster divinity. (Ellis 1894:158). By this, Esu divinity is implored to help the children to prosper and aid them by keeping them calm and free from quarrels and fights at this time when their parent's properties will be shared. This period is a turbulent one as some of the children will express anger and disbelief at the size of the properties and farmland allotted to them. Once he has been appeased, Esu will not interfere and make matters worse. He will leave them alone.

In the past up until the 1950s, mainly goats and sheep were slaughtered at funerals. But nowadays, most people and especially the wealthy ones slaughter mainly cows at funerals. They also slaughter some sheep and goats in addition. That is not to say that the killing of cows is the prerogative of only the wealthy. People of average means also do so and they are usually able to

afford this by saving up for it; by entering into an *esusu* agreement with other people or by getting the cows on credit from the butchers and entering into an agreement to pay by instalments. When the last method is adopted, it is usually on an interest-free basis. Those individuals who cannot afford to slaughter a cow each may jointly purchase a cow and pay for the services of butchers who will slaughter it and share it equally for them. But why the move from slaughtering goats and sheep to slaughtering cows?

People generally acknowledge the fact that the smaller animals are "full of bones" and that there is no way of chopping up the meat without including some of the bones. When two pieces of meat are offered to a particular guest therefore, he or she may end up having the bony parts of the meat. The host may not even be aware of this; for the meat is not examined in the pot for bones before being served. Hence the Yoruba say "picking up pieces of meat in the dish is a matter of luck". The lucky ones end up with the fleshy, succulent parts.

People care about this and end up using cows because those guests who are offered bony meat at funerals consider it as an offensive act and thus become

aggrieved. This is dangerous because the funeral ceremony is considered as a sacrifice and for a sacrifice to be efficacious, guests must generally be satisfied with the food and drinks served. The dissatisfaction of the guests may apart from invalidating the sacrifice (McClelland 1982:51), also lead the witches among the guests, to work against the hosts. Abimbọla (1976:167-169) relates the story of Erubami, a woman who refused to give bean cakes (*àkàrà*) to the witches' mother. She was subsequently troubled by them. They stopped troubling her when she gave bean cakes to their mother.

Even when bony parts of the goat's or sheep's meat is not offered to witches, the hosts may also end up in trouble with them because they have not given the best parts of the meat to them. The Ifẹ consider the intestines, liver, kidney and all the edible inner parts (entrails) of the goat and the sheep as the main delicacies. It is also widely believed that the witches prefer these to being served other parts of the meat. (Awolalu 1973:91). Whenever they attend a funeral, childnaming or "housewarming" ceremony and are not offered the delicacies, they are believed to "go after" the hosts and inflict them with misfortune or illness shortly after the ceremony. One way of avoiding these

troubles and getting the support of men, women and the witches is to slaughter a cow which when skinned and chopped has little bones and whose entrails are not much sought after. The support of the witches and other human beings are important in these celebrations (Abimbọla 1976:37); and this has led to this major change in the celebration of funeral rites in Ifẹ.

The practice of dripping blood on the body in the grave has been abandoned when burying ordinary folks. This was due to the pressures of close relatives, who as Christians, consider such practices as "heathen" ones. But the practice is maintained at the burial of titled Ifá priests, ritual chiefs and the King Ọọ̀ni.

Also in the past, food and some personal effects were usually put into the grave at burials. (Ellis 1894:158; Idowu:1962:190). The belief was that the dead would fall upon these food and articles in his or her times of need.[2] These practice has been abandoned by the ordinary folks but it has been maintained at the burial of the King Ọọ̀ni. Food and drinks are still offered to the dead by putting these on the grave but not in the grave. But why are food and articles no longer put in the grave?

There are two reasons for this. Firstly, precious articles may be stolen from the grave at night by grave robbers who would leave the grave uncovered in their hurry to get away with the loot. Expensive coffins have been stolen in this way, with the bodies left in the open grave. Secondly, since the food offered to guests at funerals are meant for the dead, it has been considered in recent times as an adequate way of providing for its need.

There are also some changes in the way in which corpses are prepared for burial. In the last century and the early part of this century, the hair on the deceased's head and indeed all bodily hair was completely shaved. (Crowther 1844, in McKenzie 1976a:99; Ellis 1894:156; Awolalu 1980:29; Ọlatunji 1975:76; Bascom 1969b:66). This as Daramola and Jeje (1967:169) maintain is to ensure that the deceased goes into the afterlife in a clean, pure form and is made free of all impurities. These days, just a bit of the hair on the head is shaved and it is accepted as being symbolic of a total, clean shave. But why the change of practice?

Up until the early 1960s, old men dress their head by shaving it completely. That was the acceptable method of keeping tidy. (Bascom 1969b:100; Daramola & Jeje

1967:95). But even then, middle-aged and young men prefer to have a hair-cut at the barber's. As a result of modern civilization, there was this gradual shift from having a complete shave to having an hair-cut. By the 1970s, and until now, old men have adopted the modern trend but as old habits die hard, some of them still prefer the complete shave. In a similar way the head of the dead was shaved before burial in the past. People have now adopted the modern way of giving the dead an hair-cut, by shaving the hair on the edges of the head. This is a symbol of a total shave.

There have also been some changes in the way in which the corpse is ritually bathed. In the last century and early this century, water with sponge and soap were used to wash the body; the corpse was then massaged with redwood. (Dennett 1910:30). Nowadays, only sponge, soap and water are used. At that time, and until the early 1960s, the body was usually placed on an inverted mortar where it was washed. (Bascom 1969b:66). Nowadays, the body is placed in a sitting position on a chair and supported by about two or three men while the others do the washing. The mortar is still used by only a few people, but a large number of people now use chairs. There are two reasons for this change. Firstly, there is

a taboo which states that when a body is washed on an inverted mortar, the surviving spouse of the dead must not partake of any food prepared in the mortar after this event. There is the belief that if the surviving spouse were to eat from such food, the deceased may forcibly cause the spouse's death. But the spouse may be presented with food prepared in the mortar by people who were not aware of the prohibition. He or she may therefore eat this food by mistake. In order to avoid this, the mortar is not used again for the preparation of food. Secondly, some people, especially the educated consider the use of the mortar for washing the body as unhygienic practice which may lead to the spread of diseases and infection. We should note that the mortar is very much in use in the preparation of different kinds of food: pounded yam; *foofoo* (cassava food) and sometimes *ẹ̀bà*, another type of cassava food. Hence the chair is preferred to the mortar as a safe alternative.

The way in which the dead is laid out and displayed after washing and dressing the body has changed. Dennett (1910:30) notes that the body was usually laid on a mat for display. These days, the body is laid on a decorated bed in a room in the home of the deceased or outside.

This change has to do with the fact that people now sleep on beds and no longer on mats as they did in the past.

Another prominent change in the celebration of funeral rites in Ile-Ifẹ is in the use of coffins. In the 18th century and early in the 19th century, the corpse was always buried while wrapped up in shroud, and no coffin was ever used. Effort was made to dig and use a deep grave so as to prevent pigs and hyenas from digging up and eating the body. But towards the middle of the 19th century, some sort of make-shift coffins known as "*aseh/àà*ṣ̀ẹ̀" were in use by the missionaries. (Crowther 1844, in McKenzie 1976a:99). Such coffins were made of wooden "boards" joined together by nails. Shortly after this period, people started the practice of laying sticks at the bottom of the grave and putting the corpse on them before the grave is covered up. But the turning point came in 1857 when a Christian convert was buried with a coffin.[3] Charles Phillips notes that "sawyer boards" were used for making the coffin. This was a significant development not only for Ijaiye where this took place but the technology began to spread to other parts of Yorubaland. By about 1876, important people endeavoured to have coffins made for them. These they kept in the loft of their houses until their death. James White

gives a report of how "the King of Igbesa" asked some people to make a coffin for him by using the doors in his palace.[4] Towards the end of the 19th century, the art of making coffins was widely known but only a few people used coffins to bury the dead. (Ellis 1894:158). This was due to the prohibitive cost of having one made and even in the early part of this century, it was used mainly by wealthy families. (Johnson 1921:137).

At that time in Ile-Ifẹ, bodies continued to be buried without coffins. But by the late 1930s and 1940s, big trees were felled; the upper and the lower parts were sawn off and a big hollow was drilled in the middle part. The body would be placed in this. A flat plank was also cut off and this was used for covering up the "coffin". Raw eggs were smashed on the coffin and a fowl's head was snatched off and the blood was dripped over the coffin. The coffin was then dragged out of the forest to the deceased's house where the body was put in it. Big bolts and nuts specially made by the smithy were then used to seal the coffin firmly. The proliferation of modern technical skills, in this respect, carpentry, gave a lot of men the skills of making lightweight, wooden coffins. By 1950 and until now, these types of coffins have been

in use in Ile-Ife but the very rich prefer the expensive coffins made by some firms.

A cluster of changes in the celebration of funeral rites in Ile-Ife has to do with the way in which the funeral banquets are held; the number of days and weeks in which they are held; commemorations; the way in which the grave is treated and the number of days in which the kin of the dead have to remain at home after burial. The details are as follows.

Firstly, funerals were celebrated endlessly for days and weeks, and the feasts were held for guests by the kin of the dead for that period in Ile-Ifẹ. Crowther (1844, in McKenzie 1976a:100) specified seven days for other parts of Yorubaland. Hence, Farrow notes that funeral expenses was "very great". (1926:108). Today, funerals are celebrated continuously for three days in Ifẹ: Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Secondly, there was an elaborate system of commemorating the dead in Ile-Ifẹ. On the third day after burial, *ìta*, a commemoration ceremony was held and a feast was provided by the kin of the dead. The same ceremony was held on the fifth day, the seventh day, (Talbot 1926:476), the seventeenth day, the fortieth day and after one year; the one year feast being known as

"laying the dead upon its other side". (Johnson 1921:138). The menu on the third day usually include *eko* and vegetable soup. At all the ceremonies, goat and sheep were slaughtered for the feast and plenty of drinks were presented to guests. Nowadays, only the wealthy celebrate a few of those commemoration ceremonies; and these are limited to two or three: seventh, twenty-first and fortieth day. Even for the wealthy, if the twenty-first day commemoration was celebrated, only bean cakes (*àkàrà*) will be presented to guests by the kin of the dead. In that case, the fortieth day commemoration will be celebrated with plenty of food, the slaughter of goats and sheep and a lot of drinks. It is also customary for the rich to celebrate the one-year commemoration with a big feast. As for the poor, they may celebrate only the fortieth day and one-year commemoration. On the fortieth day, they present bean cakes (*àkàrà*) to guests but they try to slaughter a goat for the one year feast.

Thirdly, it was the practice for the relatives of the dead to pour water on the grave after burial. They did this so as to make the grave level up with the surrounding ground. People were also made to sleep on the spot for several nights. (Ellis 1894:158-9). This according to Ellis, was to make the grave unrecognizable

and protect the dead from being violated by its enemies. But there was another reason for pouring water on the grave. There is the belief that if this was done, the dead will become used to having so much water around, as this will be helpful for him or her in its effort to cross all the rivers on its journey to the afterlife. (Ọlatunji 1975:79). This arose from the Yoruba belief that the dead has to cross many rivers and climb many mountains on its journey home, to heaven. These days, water is still poured on the grave to make the soil settle down but no one now sleeps on the grave. Instead of the grave being left to become unrecognizable, expensive gravestones are erected and the deceased's names, dates of birth and death are engraved on them. The deceased's praise poems (*oríki*) are also put on the headstones. Besides, the fact that a lot of dead bodies are buried at church cemeteries and other such places makes sleeping on some of the graves impossible.

It was also usual for the kin of the dead to invite drummers to the home of the deceased on the third day. They would then go to the forest to fetch logs of wood. On arrival at the home of the deceased, a goat was slaughtered, food was cooked and the logs of wood were put on the grave and set on fire. The logs were called

"the logs of the third day". Logs were usually fed into the fire until the night of the seventh day. The belief was that this was necessary to keep the deceased warm in the damp grave. The feasting was kept up until the seventh day. While this practice of keeping the log fire burning was in place in Ile-Ifẹ until the early 1950s, elsewhere in Yorubaland, only a lamp was kept lighted there at all times although people were requested to sit there. (Ọlatunji 1975:78). This version of the practice can also be found in rural Greece (Danforth 1982:132). In modern times, this practice has been discontinued. It has to do with the influence of the teachings of Christianity and Islam on punishment for the condemned after death: that they will burn in a scotching furnace. Keeping logs burning on the grave will seem to be an earthly dispensation of such judgement.

Fourthly, there was the practice of the kin and friends of the deceased sitting at the home of the deceased for up to three months or more after the death. They did this so as to receive all sympathizers whenever it suited them to pay their visits. This practice is no longer in place. Most of the kin of the dead, these days, sit in the deceased's home for just a few days. But why did these cluster of changes take place?

Poverty accounts for the first reason. People in Ile-Ife and generally in Yorubaland have become poorer than they were in the 1960s and 1970s. Public expenditure has been greatly reduced by the government, there is increasing unemployment (Lloyd 1975:88; B.B. Lloyd 1970:172), and evidence of absolute poverty can be seen all around the region. Poor people cannot engage in endless feasting.

Secondly, there is the emphasis on the cultivation of cash crops such as cocoa, kola nuts and rubber. These are planted at the expense of cultivation of food crops. (Grigg 1985:259-262). The role of the World Bank and the then Cocoa Development Unit (C.D.U.) of Nigeria's Federal Department of Agriculture cannot be over-emphasized here. Farmers in Southwestern Nigeria were given seedlings, chemicals, fertilizers and a low-interest loan by the C.D.U. and were encouraged to develop new cocoa plantations.[5] The project was funded for over thirty years by the World Bank. Vast areas of cultivatable land were cleared by the farmers and put to cocoa production to satisfy the demand of chocolate and beverage manufacturers in the Western world. This project reduced the amount of land left for the production of food and that in turn led to the shortage of food in Southwestern

Nigeria. (Grigg 1985:81; Berry 1985:98).[6] Much needed food is thus not available readily for use at funerals or even when available can be expensive.

Thirdly, farmers depend largely on the use of small implements such as hoes and cutlasses/matchets for the cultivation of crops. With such methods of cultivation, agricultural productivity is always low, and the farmers who are mainly peasants produce little food for sale. (Crow 1985:6). This also explains why food is scarce and why people can no longer engage in endless celebration of funeral rites and commemoration.

Fourthly, the advent of blue and white-collar jobs with rigid times and days of attendance has left people with no chance of waiting at the home of the dead for days and months. This has led to the end of such practice. Even those who are self employed in craft occupations cannot stay at the home of the dead for months. They have to go to work or else they will starve.

Furthermore, the drift of people into the big cities for work and other opportunities has kept them away from their home city of Ife. Kin groups have been broken up; (Berry 1985:44) and not everyone has the chance to participate actively in all those endless rites although

they attend and participate in the celebration of the final funeral.

A large number of people have acquired Western education in Ile-Ifẹ. This has led to changes in their values and in what most of them consider to be important.[7] As a result, some of them attach little importance to the celebration of funeral rites, especially if these will be costly and take a lot of their time. Also connected to this point is the fact that kinship relationships are not as closely bound and highly valued as it was in the past. The more educated a person is, the less he or she is bound to consider kinship relationship as being an institution which must be honoured and which carries certain obligations with it.[8] In modern times, very educated people in Ife tend to change the kinship relationship *(àjọbí)* into the relationship between ordinary neighbours. The latter is what Akiwowo (1983:18-20) describes as "co-residentship" and defines as "..the fact of sharing the same or contiguous shelter whether or not the sharers are related by blood". He asserts that such people by their "thoughts, words, acts, and behaviour do negate, deny, or break asunder.....the bonds of *àjọbí* relationships between them and others" (p.19). This they reflect in Ife

by not participating actively in all the funeral celebrations and commemorations.

We must also note that all other Yoruba groups in Southwestern Nigeria criticize the Ife for their excessive, expensive and elaborate funeral and commemorative rites. This has led to a remarkable change in the attitude of the Ife to the celebration of funeral rites. Also connected with this point is the fact that there has been a greater level of intermarriage between the Ifẹ, other Yoruba groups and other Nigerian ethnic groups. The spouses thus bring their own opinion to bear on the celebration of funeral rites in Ile-Ifẹ.[9] This has led to the celebrations being scaled down.

Another area where there has been a little change is the issue of unproductive competition. People usually invest their resources in ceremonies such as rites of passage, housewarming etc, so as to perpetuate the Yoruba notion of patronage in which more affluent people have to act as worthwhile patrons to the less well-off and in which the older people have to help the younger ones out whenever there is the need for that. (Aronson 1978:157-158).[10] They do this so that the beneficiaries can remain loyal to them and reciprocate in a similar manner. Savings which should have been reinvested on their

businesses and farms are thus wasted. Berry has put it succinctly:

"...People invest in access to productive resources instead of in the expansion of productive capacity.. People dissipate their energies in ceaseless mobility and their savings in pursuit of the means of competition instead of building the means of competition". (1985:193).[11]

In Ile-Ifẹ, this is the situation with a lot of people. But for a small number of people, there has been a remarkable change in which they abhor wasteful spending. They thus spend a limited amount of money on ceremonies such as funerals and commemorations while investing their profits on their farms, businesses, buildings and shares. Educated citizens are at the forefront of this change.

The way in which the properties of the deceased is shared and inherited in Ile-Ifẹ has led to a major change in the way in which funerals and commemorations are celebrated. In the past until the 1950s, the main beneficiaries of the deceased were his siblings. (Fadipe 1970:18 & 316). The children of the deceased had no special rights to their parent's properties. That was the time when "wicked uncles" deprived their nephews of the

dead's properties. (Lloyd 1959:14). But the situation has changed now. Since the middle of the 1950s, new laws which protect the interests of the wife and children of the dead has come into effect. (Lloyd 1963:41). When a man now dies, the properties of the lineage in his possession passes to his siblings while the properties which he acquired himself are inherited by his children and wives, (Lloyd 1959:12, 19,& 23; 1966b:561). The deceased's siblings therefore no longer inherit the properties of their brother. This has led to a change in the scope of the celebration of the funeral and commemoration by the siblings and half-brothers and sisters of the dead. Before the legislation came into effect, they could hold extensive and expensive funeral banquets and recoup their outlays from the estate of the dead as it normally reverted to them. Nowadays they ensure that they do not incur much debt as a result of the celebrations because if they did, they cannot inherit the properties of the dead and recover their losses. They have therefore scaled down the amount of money they spend on funerals and commemorations.

Another change has to do with the lamentation of the dead and the use of professional mourners at funerals. Just like the Greeks, the Ife people consider lamentation

"as a social duty". (Alexiou 1974:50). When a death takes place therefore, dirges were rendered in all cases in the past by women and some men who were versed in it.[12] In most of those instances in the past (late 19th Century and early 20th Century), professional mourners were employed to weep, wail and render the dirges with the real mourners. (Ellis 1894:157). This practice was common in wealthy homes. In modern times, professional mourners have disappeared from the scene but dirges are still being sung by a small number of women in Ile-Ifẹ. (There is a professional singer of dirges in Ile-Ifẹ, one Mr. Famelu.[13]) Singing of dirges is an art and not all women can do it, especially in this age when all traditional aspects of culture are regarded as "uncivilized", "backward", and "unchristian" by some educated people and the Pentecostal Christians. It is an art which was usually learnt and passed on from one generation to another. It is difficult to find women who are interested in learning the art in modern times hence it is not sung at all funerals and it is disappearing fast.

Certain activities were proscribed at Christian funerals by the early missionaries. These include "drumming, singing, dancing, feasting and the firing of guns".[14] This was done to prevent the converts from

returning to "idolatory". Over the years, the Anglicans, Methodists and the Baptists have reviewed their practices and Christians in those churches now engage in all the above practices at funerals. They were allowed to participate in those activities possibly to stem the flow of their members into the Independent African Churches. It is interesting to note that a small number of Pentecostal Churches have brought back such rules. An example is the Deeper Life Bible Church in Ile-Ife where members are discouraged from participating in funeral celebrations, especially if the funeral were to be postponed and celebrated weeks or months after death. They normally use a saying of Jesus to back up their action: "...and let the dead bury their dead". (Matthew 8:22). Since they interpret the Bible in a literal sense, they claim that Jesus requested the living to leave the dead alone to help themselves. They therefore participate only in the burial ceremony and do not engage in the subsequent feasting, dancing and singing. This situation is splitting families apart in Ife, as the action of the members of the Deeper Life Bible Church sets one group against the other.

In the past up till the early 1950s, a special shrine was usually consecrated at home to the spirit of

the deceased ancestor and all the other ancestors of the family. This was usually done shortly after the funeral. It has been described as "bringing the spirit of the deceased into the house". (Idowu 1962:190-191 & Ray 1976:144). It was done so as to facilitate easy access to a place where the deceased and other ancestors could be venerated and approached for help. Except in the lineages where *egúngún* masquerades are brought out and those in which *babalawo*, herbalists, priests, ritual chiefs and worshippers of the divinities could be found, special shrines are no longer dedicated to specific ancestors at home. Rather, a special shrine is dedicated to all the ancestors of each lineage in the central hall (*àkòdi*) of each lineage in Ife. Thus there are shrines dedicated to the ancestors of Adagba lineage and Otutu lineage in their respective central halls. There the ancestors are venerated. But why has this change taken place?

The main reason lies in the fact that people who have such shrines in their homes will be regarded as unbelievers and infidels by committed Christians and Muslims. There is therefore the social pressure to conform to the teachings of Christianity and Islam. That is not to say that a lot of Yoruba Christians and Muslims in Ife do not venerate the dead like the adherents of the

traditional religion. They do in the meeting hall of the lineages and at the grave of the dead.[15]

The other reason has to do with the fact that the building and use of a special shrine in modern houses may be considered to be untidy and unhygienic as bits of food and lots of drinks may be offered at the shrine. The shrine may thus be a breeding ground for flies and other insects. Hence they are not found in modern houses.

When a young man or woman died in the early part of this century, his or her companions held a formal ceremony of separation. (Johnson 1921:140; Farrow 1926:128-129). This was done at a "crossroad" where the companions would shout out the names of the deceased three times and thereafter disowned him or her by crying out that he has been separated from them from that moment. There was the belief that if this was not done, the deceased would continue to go around with his or her earthly companions (although they would not see him) and might cause their death. Nowadays, young men and women do not hold any formal rite of separation for their deceased companions. The fear that their friend may cause their death is no longer apparent. The fear these days is that the deceased's ghost may haunt the dwellings of the living companions during the first few weeks of death.

They therefore avoid staying alone during this period. At the expiration of this period, it is believed that the soul of the dead would have left the vicinity. This explains why the properties of the dead were burnt in the 19th century. (Ellis 1894:159).[16] The soul was usually driven away from the neighbourhood by this action; his properties having been destroyed, he or she would not linger around to haunt the living. This practice has since been abandoned, because people needed the properties and saw this destruction as a senseless waste of resources.

Changes have also been observed in the ways in which messages of the news of death are being sent to relatives and friends of the dead. In the 19th century and up till the first half of this century, a well-known article of the deceased was usually sent through a messenger to those to whom the news of death was to be broken or this item might be put on a string and tied to the neck of a dog; the dog was then sent to those people. On seeing the dog with the deceased's article, the people would immediately realize that the owner of the article had died. This mode of message is known as *àrokò*. Abraham (1958:65) notes that it serves "...as an emblem which conveys a message". We should note that it is not only in

the situation of death that *aroko* was used.[17] It is still used today by hunters and members of the secret societies.

In the situation of death, the cap of the deceased and the young shoot of the palm leaf (*màrìwò*) were sent to friends and relatives of the deceased. Sometimes a small lump of laterite from the grave might be sent. (Ọpadotun 1986:34). Although this practice is no longer in place among the people generally, its demise can be traced to the widespread use of the post and other modern means of communication such as the telephone, telex and the telegram.

When a man died in the past, an effigy or a mask of him was usually made. This was to show that he has been changed from the status of a man to that of an ancestors, and might be on his way to heaven. The practice was to destroy or bury the effigy to show this change of state. (Lawal 1977:54).[18] This practice has been discontinued but can still be found in the lineages where *egúngún* and other masquerades are brought out.

Finally, all bodies were buried according to Yoruba custom before the advent of Islam and Christianity. Then those religions permeated the land and consequently, we now have different forms of burial and commemoration.

But as stressed earlier on in the study, various practices have been adapted from the traditional method.

Summary:

There has been many changes in the celebration of funeral rites by the Ife people. The first change is in the offering of the fare-fowl, goats and sheep at funerals and commemorations. In modern times, the fare-fowl is not slaughtered at some funerals. The corpses of ordinary folks are also no longer sprinkled with blood while in the open grave, (before the grave is filled). Such practices are considered "heathen" by Christians.

Cows are now slaughtered at funerals although goats and sheep may be added. This practice has been adopted because that the smaller animals (goats and sheep) are "full of bones". Some guests end up with bony pieces of meat. This is said to be offensive. The guests may become aggrieved, thus invalidating the funeral sacrifice. The witches among the guests may also harm the hosts.

Food and personal effects of the dead are no longer put into the grave at burials. The practice has been abandoned at the burial of ordinary people. The reasons for this are the fear of grave robbers and the belief

that the offering of food at funerals are adequate means of satisfying the needs of the dead.

The head of the dead is no longer shaved completely. Just some of the hair is shaved as this is accepted as a symbol of a total shave. Nowadays, the corpse is bathed with only sponge, soap and water. The body is also placed on a chair instead of a mortar. It is also laid out on a bed; mats are no longer used for that purpose. Coffins are now used to bury the dead.

Funerals are no longer celebrated endlessly for weeks and months, but are celebrated only on three days: Friday, Saturday and Sunday. The elaborate method of commemorating the dead has largely been abandoned. Two or three commemoration ceremonies are now held: on the seventh, twenty-first and fortieth day. Water is no longer poured on the grave and people no longer sleep on it. Fires are also no longer made with logs on the grave. Relatives and friends no longer stay with the bereaved for months.

The changes took place because of poverty; declining food production; the advent of blue and white collar jobs with rigid times of attendance; the drift of people into the big cities for work and the acquisition of Western education with its attendant changes in peoples' values.

Professional mourners are no longer used but dirges are still being sung by a small number of women in Ile-Ifẹ. The members of some Pentecostal Churches in Ile-Ifẹ do not want to participate in the feasting, singing and dancing at funerals.

Individual shrines are no longer dedicated at home for specific ancestors. Rather, a special shrine is dedicated to all the ancestors of each lineage in the central hall. Nowadays, young men and women do not hold any formal rites of separation for their deceased companions. We also note that messages of death are no longer commonly sent by the use of *àrokò*. But it is still used today by hunters and members of the secret societies.

Finally, in the past, all bodies were buried according to Yoruba custom before the advent of Christianity and Islam. With the growth of these religions, we now have different forms of burials and commemorations but various practices have been adopted from the traditional method.

Endnotes:

[1]. See also Dennett 1910:31 and Farrow 1926:108.

[2]. Journal of Charles Nathaniel Young, C.M.S. Archives, Yoruba Mission, CA2 098 of 2.2.1879.

[3]. Journal of Charles Philips, C.M.S. Archives, Yoruba Mission , CA2 077 of 22.2.1857.

[4]. James White (Annual Letters) CA2 087 of 20.11.1876. C.M.S. Archives, Yoruba Mission.

[5]. See also S.George, How the Other Half Dies. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976, pg. 39.

[6]. As at 1975, when Lloyd published Africa in Social Change, cocoa replanting was just taking off in Southwestern Nigeria. Hence, Lloyd's assertion that it had not reduced the quantity of food crops. That view is no longer current.

[7]. Sara Berry (1985:115) gives the example of primary school teachers in the villages around Ifẹ, whose main aim was to save as much as possible from their salaries so that they could attend a higher school or university. Such people will definitely resent contributing much money to funerals and commemorations. See also Peel 1978:150 and Aronson 1978:72.

[8]. For a stimulating discussion of this point, see Berry 1985:83ff.

[9]. Hence, Laitin (1986:110) observes that "intermarriages among people from different ancestral cities provides

opportunities for identity adjustment by the next generation".

[10]. See also Barber (1991:183-236) for the notion of "big men" and patronage in Okuku. The same principle applies in Ile-Ife. See particularly pages 183-4 and 242-245. This has always been so in Yorubaland generally for years. Professor P. Morton-Williams also makes a reference to this in passing : "..wealthy Yoruba chiefs used their riches to attract large followings.." (1972:886).

[11]. See also Berry 1985:10 & 75. M.T. Drewal shares Berry's view: "..As economists see it, people invest their incomes in ceremonies such as funerals and installations to reinforce relations of seniority and patronage as a strategy for competing for wealth and influence". (1989:23).

[12]. By dirges here, we mean "...formalised praise of the virtues of the dead, often in partly traditional and partly improvised couplets". (Alexiou 1974:40).

[13]. Barber (1991:16,100 & 131) gives an example of a professional *oríkì* singer in Okuku named Sangowemi. She is the only professional performer in the town and performs at festivals and funerals. This confirms the declining number of such artists in Yorubaland.

[14]. Journal of Daniel Olubi, Yoruba Mission. CA2 075 of 21.3.1868.

[15]. Contrary to the assertion of J.S. Trimingham (1968:73) that muslims do not fear that the dead may harm them if they are neglected, some Ife Muslims as well as Christians venerate the dead for fear of reprisals. See also Doi 1971:43.

[16]. See also Middleton's study of the Kikuyu and the Masai where the deceased's properties were buried with him or put on his grave. (1953:65). They usually leave the site altogether and this action has the same effect like that mentioned for the Yoruba: the soul is either driven away or left alone.

[17]. In 1854, the "King of Ijebu" (Awùjalẹ̀) sent an *àrokò* to the missionary David Hinderer to invite him to visit his city. It "composed of ten cowries strung together, and a seed of the *ọsàn* fruit". (Anna Hinderer 1873:109-110).

[18]. See also Willett (1966) and Abiọdun (1976) on the use of funeral effigies.

Conclusion: The Role of Women in the Burial Rituals of the Ife.

The role of women in the performance of burial rites in Ile-Ifẹ cannot be over-emphasized. They act as ritual personnel in the celebration of the rite of *ẹkún òwúrọ̀* held for a deceased wife of the lineage. Without the celebration of this rite, the children of the deceased woman cannot attend funeral rites celebrated by other people. If they did, it is believed that they may die. Women also act as ritual officials in the celebration of the rites of *Ẹ̀ṣọ́ gbígbé* in the lineages of Ẹ̀ṣọ́ Ìkòyí. This rite is also a mandatory rite of separation.

At the death of the old, it is the women who lead the announcement of the death (*òkú wíwá* ceremony) by singing and dancing around the City. All the purchase of foodstuff, the cooking and giving out of food at funerals and commemorations also fall into the category of women's work in Ile-Ife and Yorubaland. This is important because of the emphasis put on food at these ceremonies: food is presented to people as sacrifice; food eaten at the ceremonies are sent indirectly to the ancestors so that they may not starve and eat inedible things. It is food then, which mediates between the world of the living and that of the dead. If the ancestors are happy with the living offspring, the latter will not run

into troubles because the ancestors will use the powers acquired at death to help and protect them.

It is also women in Ile-Ifè who celebrate the funeral of their parents and grandparents in a grand way by inviting people to the *ìba pípè* ceremony. Those invited are usually members of their societies, clubs or associations. They are always a great spectacle to see at these ceremonies: the endless feasting; the dancing amidst loud drumming and singing; the procession around the area; the colourful dresses specially chosen for the occasion; the efforts by one club to outdo the others and the festive nature of the occasion.

By the singing of dirges, rendering of *oríkì* and singing of songs at the funeral of the old, women ensure that funeral rites are celebrated correctly, thereby making the rites efficacious. On the death of the young and the middle-aged, women take on the task of weeping, wailing and mourning. They do not bath, do not eat regularly; they wear black dresses and widows particularly, become polluted. Women have to go through the rites of purification (shaving the head, bathing, giving out of black dresses and going around to sympathizers on thank-you visits). Indeed, it can be said that funeral ceremonies revolve around women in Ile-Ifẹ.

Appendix.
Calendar of Traditional Festivals in Ile-Ife.

No.	Festival	Month	Chief Celebrant
1.	*Àgbọn*	May	Ọlọ́sàárà
2.	*Odi Orire*	May	Awo Chiefs
3.	*Orò Ìwàrà*	May	Ọbàwàrà
4.	*Òrìṣà Àdátán*	May	
5.	*Oro Ayigun*	May	Òkè-Èsọ́ People
6.	*Ègbodò Ọ̀ọ̀ni*	June	Awo Chiefs
7.	*Ègbodò Ọràmfẹ̀*	June	Awo Chiefs
8.	*Òkè Àgbọnnìrègún*	June	Awo Chiefs
9.	*Ilaja Isu Tuntun*	June	Town People
10.	*Ègbodò Èrìò*	July	Awo Chiefs
11.	*Olookun Agbagba and Egungun*	July	Town People
12.	*Ogido*	July	Ọbalúfẹ̀/Ọ̀rúntọ́
13.	*Igun Ore*	August	Olópo
14.	*Igun Efon*	August	Ọbalára
15.	*Igun Ogiyan*	August	Dukes & Duchesses
16.	*Ekun Ajimuda*	August	Reigning King Ọ̀ọ̀ni
17.	*Lúwò*	August	Owodo Compound
18.	*Ìgbeyàwó*	Sept/Oct	All Marriageable Adults
19.	*Ọlọ́jọ́ & Ògún*	Oct.	Ifẹ Chiefs
20.	*Ọdẹ Ọràmfẹ̀*	Oct.	Ọbalúru/Ọbalóògùn/ Olúróyè

21.	*Ọlọja*	Nov.	Látalẹ̀ Compound
22.	*Ọdẹ Ọmọ Ọ̀ọ̀ni*	Nov.	All Princes
23.	*Ẹsa/Ajé Ọjà Ifẹ̀*	Nov.	Igare Efure
24.	*Ferekete*	Nov.	Ọbalá̀à̀yán
25.	*Edì/Ẹ̀bẹ̀ Mọ̀remi*	Nov.	Èrí and Yékéré
26.	*Ọ̀rùngbè*	Nov/Dec.	Mọdéwá
27.	*Elésìjẹ́*	Dec.	Okunora Ẹlesiję
28.	*Meje Ijedun: Ìkirè, Ilemo-Oke, Iro Oke-Awo; Irawe Ọbalufọn, Erinmi, Osun Agẹmọ.*	Dec.	Ọba Akire, Ilémolẹ̀, Ifegun, Ọbalara, Iddo Ilarẹ & Igbó Agbo
29.	*Ọ̀òduà/Odùduwà/Ìdio*	Dec/Jan.	Ọbadio
30.	*Irò Ìwàrà*	Jan.	Ọbawàrà
31.	*Ìddó*	Jan.	Ọ̀mipetu
32.	*Ọbalá̀ayè*	Jan.	Ọ̀ọ̀ni & Ọbalá̀ayè
33.	*Ajé Ọbàtálá/Òrìṣànlá/ Itapa*	Jan.	Ọbalésù/Ọbalálẹ̀
34.	*Ọbameri*	Jan.	Ọba Lókòrẹ́
35.	*Igbolokun*	Feb.	Àpatà
36.	*Ìlásẹ̀ Olúorogbo*	Feb.	Ọbalásẹ̀
37.	*Pòkúlere*	Feb.	Ọbawinrin
38.	*Ọbarese Ìjùgbẹ̀*	Feb/Mar.	Ọbalẹ́jùgbẹ̀
39.	*Omitóto Jasan (Ose)*	March	Ọbàlọràn
40.	*Ọwalarẹ*	Apr.	Waami
41.	*Olókun Wálódè*	Apr.	Wálódè

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